Becoming invisible: art and day-to-day life

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BECOMING INVISIBLE: ART AND DAY-TO-DAY LIFE

by

Laura Wild

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

June 2011

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BECOMING INVISIBLE: ART AND DAY-TO-DAY LIFE

Abstract

The thesis identifies a methodology for practice-led Fine Art research that emphasises day-to-day processes, which tend to be overlooked, and a practice, which becomes invisible to the mainstream art world. Attending to day-to-day habitual process is found to open up possibilities for embodied becoming through thinking and re-membering. Negotiating boundaries in face-to-face encounter is discovered to encourage inter-subjective becoming and is explored in terms of ethical interaction. The reflexive methodology considers questions arising from the possibility of exchange instead of gift, art as process rather than commodity, and an attitude of dissensus relating to artists as nonconformists. Tension and interaction in community leads to a pacific process of immanent invisibility, which functions as quiet activism and gentle politics provided by readymade situations.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s Touch Sanitation (1984), Allan Kaprow’s Trading Dirt (1983) and selected works of Heath Bunting (2002-2010) are amongst the artworks cited in a discussion of artists who engage with materials or processes that are often overlooked including waste disposal, soil, and institutional structure. Emmanuel Levinas’s approach to alterity (Levinas, 1988, 172) and Julia Kristeva’s suggestion that connection cannot occur without severance (Kristeva, 1987, 254) have helped define an ethical practice of inter-subjective becoming. Victor Turner’s notion of ‘communitas’ (Turner, 1969) has affirmed a choice to avoid hierarchical structure and engage in processes that result in immanent invisibility.

My contribution to practice-led, Fine Art research has involved testing a method rather than proving a hypothesis. I have developed a methodology that values art becoming invisible during the process of emphasising the overlooked in day-to-day life. Anecdotal passages throughout the text together with links in the text to my website and web log demonstrate an integration of practice with theory, which has been arrived at through a process of reflexive speculation.

Two discs accompany the printed thesis that allow for digital reading.

Keywords:
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I finally wish to dedicate this work to the memory of those, dear to me, who have died, and who have been significant to this research, my father Peter, Lynn and David, Silver, Nokka, George, Laurie, Patrick.
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Disc1: digital version of thesis with active links to website

Disc 2: digital, off-line, version of thesis with links to web files
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Introduction

Research Questions

How can art as a process emphasise what is overlooked in day-to-day life?
How can interactions in day-to-day life engender becoming?

Methodology

This submission is a practice-led exploration into day-to-day process becoming art. Becoming is understood in the context of this thesis as ongoing, ethical development of individuals and communities. The thesis questions assumptions that art and artists require visibility in order to be valued. Rather than aspiring to visibility my practice has been becoming invisible so as to emphasise that which is, and those whom are, othered by the environments and communities they inhabit (I appropriate the term ‘other’, as a verb, to allude to situations in which marginalisation occurs on account of difference). My approach is speculative rather than strategic and requires letting go of preconception allowing for meandering, reverie and becoming momentarily lost. As such, my art occurs as minor events, which emerge within the process of gleaning what tends to have been overlooked. My process has involved reflecting on philosophy and cultural theory through the day-to-day, not the other way around, which has led to new knowledge in the field of methodologies for practice-led research. I have chosen not to adopt established methodologies such as grounded theory, action research or heuristics in order to encourage the practice to unfold unpredictably in response to chance encounters within day-to-day life. I have adopted a reflexive approach, acting attentively, to allow for embodied becoming, by which I mean unpredictable personal development experienced physically, psychologically, socially and spiritually. A reflexive approach highlights an understanding of knowledge as existing not just in the brain but also in the body, as well as its social and natural context (Davies, 2003, 4). Davies describes ecology as a self-sustaining, self-regulating system and thus intellectual ecology as a self-sustaining, self-orientating system of thinking. ‘Thinking is not an activity locked inside the head, manipulating the world outside it, as if by remote control, but an activity operating within the entire cultural system’ (ibid.). A reflexive approach has allowed me freedom to change direction and incorporate unexpected events, in particular the frequency of personal loss and grief occurring during the course of my research that has been punctuated by the deaths of friends and relatives.

Much of my Fine Art practice has taken place as day-to-day allotment gardening processes out of which digging has emerged as a trope. Digging, in the non-procedural manner in which I often engage with it, encourages a rhythm that involves my whole body whilst relaxing my mind
and letting loose my imagination. Thoughts, remembered in my body through the physical act, combine with my current thinking and together encourage embodied becoming. The absent-minded and irrational process of thinking is, from time to time, disseminated in the form of incidental anecdotes that transpire through practice.

From October 2005 a hand-written journal, in a series of notebooks, together with photography and video were my methods of documentation. In April 2007 I began writing a web-based journal in the form of a web log(1) (http://laurawild.blogspot.com/2007_04_01_archive.html) (Wild, 2007). When I started to keep the blog I set myself a rule that I would only publish texts written at the allotment, which resulted in immediate musings rather than retrospectively considered thoughts. At first these were hand-written in a series of notebooks and transcribed later at home, but I eventually took my computer with me to type and photograph images directly into it(2) (http://laurawild.blogspot.com/2007/11/spontaneous-actions-and-reactions.html). Blogging became not only a flexible and accessible way to publish my day-to-day process but also allowed for the possibility of conversational interactions with a number of readers via the comment facility.

Faced with dilemmas concerning how to communicate a practice that is deliberately meandering and anecdotal I decided to develop a website (Wild, 2011). I refer readers to my website, via hyperlinks embedded into the text of the thesis, which expand upon my practice of day-to-day process. Two digital versions of my thesis are provided on the accompanying discs. I recommend a digital reading of the thesis since the hyperlinks will then be available in the body of the text. If the printed version is preferred I advise cross-referencing the digital version of Appendix 2: Footnote List. Disc One contains the thesis with live links to the Internet. Disc Two has electronic links to my website files, on the disc, allowing the thesis to be read without access to the Internet and meeting the requirement of a permanent copy. When videos and slideshows are included in a webpage they begin automatically as the webpage is launched. Multiple videos are included in a number of web pages; I suggest, where these include conversation, pausing them all and viewing them individually. Videos and slideshows require Quick Time software, which can be downloaded from the Internet. The website can be explored via icons in the navigation bar at the top of each web page, which each lead to a sub-home page with objects that serve as links. ‘Plot’ contains links, via icons, to every page and thereby provides a pictorial index. ‘Roam’ randomly selects a new page, as does arriving at the site for the first time via the URL(3) (http://www.laurawild.co.uk).

My blog, which is ongoing despite periods of interruption, has proved an effective method with which to communicate the integration of art and day-to-day life. The blog enables me to make adjustments to my method of recording information when new opportunities emerge, rather than being constrained by the predominance of a website navigation system. For example, I

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1 http://laurawild.blogspot.com/2007_04_01_archive.html (see Appendix 1.1)
2 http://laurawild.blogspot.com/2007/11/spontaneous-actions-and-reactions.html (see Appendix 1.2)
3 http://www.laurawild.co.uk
abandoned my previously significant rule of writing only at the allotment in Derbyshire when my
practice developed beyond the one original plot into two different gardens in Truro, a new
allotment in St. Ives and various other social spaces. However, the website has the advantage,
unlike the blog, of not being inherently chronological and contains examples of my previous
practice that have relevance to current work; past and present blur into one, reflecting my
process of thinking, re-membering and becoming. Questions of ethics have continually needed
to be considered and revised; in most instances I have, for ethical reasons, anonymised
situations. When writing my blog I decided, at first, not to name anyone or divulge my
geographical location. Within my website I have included some personalisation as, and when,
verbal permissions were sought and granted.

By telling a series of anecdotal stories throughout my thesis I hope to create a connection with
my readers and accommodate my non-chronological, reflexive process. Shifts in awareness
may be experienced in the juxtaposition of theory and philosophy alongside anecdote. The
chapters demonstrate a day-to-day integration of theory with practice and consist of theoretical
discussion interspersed with anecdotes indicating that art, social action, and life in general are
inseparable in this thesis. Process is central to the thesis, the consequences of which will be
reflected upon in my conclusions. I write in the first person, to emphasise the relating of
emotional, personal encounters. I refer to people by their family names except when recounting
conversations, in which case I use first names (or assumed names for the purpose of
anonymity), by way of establishing the informality of the interaction. Quotations are indented
unless in-text and in both instances they are contained within inverted commas. Anecdotal
passages, which appear in indented italics, are mostly taken from my blog and establish a
reflexive form of writing. These anecdotes are embedded in the thesis and become integrated
with the academic voice, which comprises the main text. Together, the two forms of writing
reflect my research process and contribution to knowledge. The non-chronological form of the
thesis and website demonstrates my avoidance of strategy and imposed order. A deliberate
lack of chronology has enabled me to re-consider my art practice and discover new meaning
retrospectively in relation to newfound understanding. I concur with John Law (Law, 2008) who
suggests that ordered, clear research findings are in fact hiding ‘confusion, paradox and
imprecision’ that are inevitable and valuable in the course of research.

I sieved my homemade compost this spring and used it to sow a variety of seed that
had to be started off in the warmth of the house, then hardened-off in the greenhouse. I
decided this year for economical reasons to use up seed I already had, rather than buy
new. I watched and waited for the seedlings to emerge and develop into the plants
described on their packets. What appeared were a variety of weeds, but amongst them
were several tomato plants. Clearly what had happened was that much of the seed I
sowed was deplete and the composting process never achieved heat sufficient to kill
the seed within it. I potted up the unexpected, yet healthy, tomato plants and distributed them to friends and neighbours (Wild, 2007, 26/06/10).

Fig.1. The Unexpected Seed, Laura Wild, 2010

This anecdote indicates how my choice to use unreliable seed and homemade compost created a situation I couldn't have anticipated, beyond my control. In gardening terms it would have been deemed unorthodox whereas for me, as art practice, it provided an unfolding opportunity for meeting with others when I distributed the tomato seedlings. In this instance, the emergence and flourishing of the unexpected seed indicated my intention to be guided by process and circumstance, a welcome invitation to explore in different directions. My practice does not attempt to propagate a particular political discourse but rather allows for chance, as in the unexpected seed, to unsettle imposed ideological values offering a softer, more intimate method for revealing insights into the overlooked. As such, my practice is political insofar as the relinquishing of power is a political position. My focus is on art not politics though quietly active and gently political. I examine, through practice, ethical approaches to collaborative art in a community setting but without the objective to facilitate, as evidenced by community art, although chance conversations can sometimes result in my practice being facilitative by default.

I acknowledge the importance of artists and critics who through their practice and commentary have visualised, politicised and made accessible, art practices that exist on the borders between art and life. My practice has meandered into areas of psychology and spirituality; what began as a mostly solitary practice has become peopled and may appear to bear some of the marks of a therapeutic practice particularly in relation to encounters with survivors of trauma and abuse. What distinguishes my practice from therapy is its focus on ‘becoming’ rather than ‘recovery’. Therapy implies a movement from the status of victim, via recovery, to survivor whereas becoming is a term that is non-prescriptive. I in no way intend to belittle the actions and events that lead to individuals and societies being described as victims. I do, however, believe that it is possible to describe oneself or, worse, be described as such and therefore feel
othered by the term. I am attempting within my practice to embody an approach, in line with a number of feminist writers, particularly Iris Marion Young, for whom the othering of difference is deemed unhelpful (Young, 1990).

In 2001, when I enrolled on a Masters in Contemporary Visual Arts, I was hoping to discover ways of working that would enable me to explore my ideas as an artist alongside my desire for social interaction. It was a defining moment for me when I was introduced to the work of Allan Kaprow, in particularly his ‘Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life’ (Kaprow, 1993). I could see that some of the activities I had been engaging in over the previous twenty years, such as befriending othered individuals and communities, could have been described as ‘lifelike art’, but which I had at the time considered to be a digression from my art practice. However, it was suggested that ‘lifelike art’ could only be the result of an intention to be art. The possibility of events or actions becoming art in retrospect has, however, remained at the core of my research and many of the themes and questions I explore in the thesis have developed from this possibility.

Definitions of Terms

**Becoming**

Aristotle used the term, becoming, to describe change, from potential to actual, from lower to higher (Dictionary.com, 2011). Rosie Braidotti describes subjective becoming as crucially transitional, taking place un-noticed, between socially accepted models of interaction and one’s own sense of self (Braidotti, 2002, 40). I understand becoming as an ongoing process of open-ended development. In each chapter I consider becoming from different perspectives. With reference to theorists from a number of disciplines, in particular artist Allan Kaprow (Kaprow, 1993), I suggest that *embodied becoming* (see Chapter One) can be encouraged by attentively performing day-to-day tasks. I explore Emmanuel Levinas’s theory of alterity in discussing *intersubjective becoming* (see Chapter Two) that can occur before words, face-to-face with another (Levinas, 1988). I reflect on Victor Turner’s anthropological theory (see Chapter Three) in discussing the notion of ‘communitas’ as a period of transition when a group initially forms, before any kind of structure has materialised (Turner, 1969). In Chapter Four I propose *becoming invisible* as an ethical position for working in collaboration with others.

My understanding is that becoming is accompanied by intuition and can be arrived at by attitudes such as allowing, waiting-on, listening-out-for and being-open-to. Becoming is in no way prescriptive or directive and, as such, unsettles dogma by questioning intellectual certainty. Philosophers and artists whom I identify with are those exploring uncertain territories of nonconformity and transgression, drawing attention to the dangers inherent in complacency and the fact that nothing ever stays the same. Becoming is therefore not constrained by disciplines.
The rhizome serves as a metaphor for becoming within situations and processes with which I choose to work. I will be investigating how art, like the rhizome, has the ability to cross boundaries, both socially and temporally in terms of its development of meaning, described by Heath Bunting as ‘reach’ (Bunting, 2008).

**Day-to-day**

Day-to-day life is ever-changing, different for everyone and dictated by each subject’s position within society and the world. I acknowledge the wealth of philosophy and cultural understanding concerning the everyday, particularly the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991) and Michel DeCerteau (1984) and more recently Ben Highmore (2002), John Roberts (2006) and Michael Sheringham (2006). I use the term day-to-day to refer to ordinary processes, which become subjectively significant, rather than processes usually recognised as art. Day-to-day therefore indicates, within this thesis, processes that could be regarded as everyday but which have the potential to be extra-ordinarily transformative.

Day-to-day processes have provided me with environments that bring together my life and art allowing opportunities for social engagement. In my practice I describe digging, unearthing and interring as day-to-day process, along with wandering and gleaning. My personal interest in day-to-day processes incorporates certain faith-based resonances that are conspicuous throughout the thesis. I acknowledge the work of others, such as Gerard Winstanley who, in the seventeenth century, successfully brought together theology and digging as a political process (Plant, 2002) and the 1960’s San Francisco Diggers who emerged from the Artists Liberation Front as a protest movement providing food that was free from the evils of monitory exchange (SF Diggers, 2011). I have chosen in this thesis not to focus in any specific depth on the non-
secular, politics or activism but rather the process of day-to-day life in terms of pacifism, gentle politics and quiet activism.

The three artists whose work I have chosen to examine in most depth are Allan Kaprow (Kaprow, 1993), who pays attention to day-to-day habitual processes in order to unsettle them, Mierle Laderman Ukeles (Ukeles, 1995), whose intention is to eliminate cultural boundaries between art and day-to-day life, and Heath Bunting (Bunting, 2009a), who draws attention to state control, hidden in day-to-day political procedures.

**Encounter**

By encounter I am referring particularly to momentary meetings or connections with others. I examine the ethical concerns of Emmanuel Levinas and Julia Kristeva in relation to face-to-face encounter, which have implications for a contemporary art practice (Levinas 1988). Encounter can involve interruption, as well as coincidence and chance, to which I suggest a pacifist response. Pacifism, a positively non-violent position, encourages a reconsideration of personal and inter-personal power relations in day-to-day life. My pacifist practice includes choosing to let go of control and enter into the movement of becoming, which in turn renders me, as artist, less commodifiable. Dialogue, gift and exchange are some of the means by which I have explored encounter (Mauss, 1993).

I acknowledge recent critiques of the term ‘communitas’ and the notion of community by Jean-Luc Nancy (Nancy, 2006) and Giorgio Agamben (Agamben, 2005) but I choose to focus on Victor Turner’s use of the term ‘communitas’ as a vulnerable, impermanent point of encounter that cannot be contained in social structure (Turner, 1969). I discuss possibilities for experiencing communitas in the context of art and day-to-day life. My thesis and practice demonstrate that encounter, as social interaction, is something the art world, in striving for visibility and recognition, has a tendency to overlook.

**Overlooked**

My practice has mostly taken place in rural, semi-rural or small town settings that are sometimes overlooked by the mainstream artworld. I have experienced the mainstream artworld to be manifest more visibly in urban settings. My non-urban position has proved advantageous to a process that explores becoming invisible. Much of my practice could be described as gleaning, by which I mean rediscovering what has been left behind or overlooked. I glean an overlooked object and work with it in a process whereby its agency develops. The overlooked can also be a subjective other (Levinas, 1988). I use the term ‘othering’ to describe a process of regarding social difference unfavourably (Young, 1990). Exile, as well as differing nomadic lifestyles, are referred to in relation to othering. In this context tension, interruption and overlapping become catalytic in the process of becoming (Flusser, 2004).
I also reflect on the overlooked in terms of loss, which can be associated with an unexpected need to let go, beyond choice, and can be embodied in exile, or in the death of a loved one. Discussing loss therefore sets the scene for change whilst acknowledging the acuteness of some losses as irreparable. Incorporated into loss is the action of letting go, sometimes through bereavement but also in terms of art practice. I focus on occasions when loss can present new and positive opportunities. I challenge recognition that requires visibility by suggesting immanent invisibility as a valuable position for an ethical process of interaction.

**Limen**

I use the term limen in referring to transitory moments of encounter. Limen can describe social space, as opposed to place, which is temporarily free from structure and is nomadic, moveable and impermanent. A liminal space can be shared and is described by Victor Turner as ‘communitas’ (Turner, 1969). Terms such as borders, boundaries, interstices and thresholds are used in describing liminal spaces, which can be associated with rites of passage and vulnerability. When liminality occurs within day-to-day life it is often experienced as tension or mess and is always associated with change. I describe my practice as liminal process in that it attends to the overlooked and offers alternatives to the othering of difference (Young, 1990) whilst taking place within day-to-day situations that are sometimes unsettling, tense and messy. Limen, therefore, can provide spaces that allow for careful renegotiation of the limits and possibilities of institutional frames.

*My cabbages are being eaten by caterpillars so rather than resorting to poison, I feed the holey cabbages containing the caterpillars to my hens. The hens enjoy both cabbage and caterpillars and lay eggs with richer yolks.*

![Fig.2. Cabbages and Caterpillars, Laura Wild, 2010](image-url)
Introduction to Chapters

In Chapter One, *Day-to-Day Becoming*, I adopt Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s use of the rhizome as metaphor (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004b) to demonstrate how *day-to-day-process* can encourage embodied becoming in overlooked ‘waste spaces left by cultivated areas’ (ibid, 20). I describe Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s motivations for moving away from the making of art objects (Felshin, 1995) and Allan Kaprow’s attention to day-to-day *habitual process* (Kaprow, 1993) to introduce my decision to explore beyond the visible, mainstream art world and recognise semi-rural, day-to-day life as art. I draw parallels across a range of references (Crouch, 2006, Berger, 2005, Carlisle, 2006, Flusser, 2004) to discuss desensitisation inherent in the performance of *habitual process*. I cite Marcel Proust (Benjamin, 1992), Ignatius of Loyola (Hughes, 1985) and Ana Mendieta (Jones, 2002) with the aim of developing a process of *thinking, re-membering and becoming*. I introduce ‘rite of passage’ alongside Julia Kristeva’s ‘abyss’ (Kristeva, 1987) to discuss ‘severance’ as crucial to a process of connection. I use the term *gleaning* to describe a process of exacting research that aims to demonstrate how overlooked objects can become catalysts for becoming rather than the embodiment of cultural value (Hallam & Hockey, 2001). I adopt Allan Kaprow’s use of game playing to encourage letting go of control as a playful, yet serious means to connection between artists and collaborators (Kelley, 2004).

In Chapter Two, *Face-to-Face Encounter*, I set about *negotiating boundaries*, and explore reflexivity as a cross-disciplinary methodology resonant with ‘ecology of knowledge’ (Davies, 2003). I analyse conversations and actions with others to explain why, and how, I decided to let go of intention and outcome in preference for interruption (Walker, 1984). To introduce *gift and exchange* I discuss exchange as a means to active collaboration in working together face-to-face with others. I develop an argument by contrasting, through my practice, Marcel Mauss’s theory of reciprocity (Mauss, 1993) with Elizabeth Grosz’s hypothesis for ‘absolute generosity’ (Grosz, 1999) and Kristeva’s ‘severance’ (Kristeva, 1987) to come to my own preference for exchange rather than gift. Having established that exchange builds trust, I explore *risking encounter*, face-to-face, in day-to-day life. I recall David Crouch’s comments about day-to-day shared process being ‘imageric and sensate, rather than ideational’ (Crouch, 2006), to underline my decision to let go of intention. I contrast Ukeles’s strategic use of face-to-face encounter, in her work *Touch Sanitation* (Ukeles, 1995), with encounters I made into temporary, social spaces to demonstrate my particular motivations in encountering others. I consider my practice retrospectively in drawing connections with how becoming can be manifest inter-subjectively. I question Emmanuel Levinas’s assertion that the other is more important than oneself in face-to-face encounter (Levinas, 1988) and bring others (Derrida, 2000, Olkowski, 1999, Kristeva, 1987) into a debate as to how separation, through rupture, encourages non-assimilative relations that I describe as *becoming pacific*. 
In Chapter Three, Ethical Interaction, I discuss how theories surrounding rites of passage (Fox&Gill, 2010) correspond with my understanding of inter-subjective becoming. I aim, through current and retrospective conversations and collaborations with other artists (Wild, 2011) to understand, in practice, Victor Turner’s communitas (Turner, 1969), that is free from ‘clichés associated with status incumbency’ and encourages ‘vital relations’ with others (ibid, 128). I analyse my current and previous experiences of temporary community (ibid.) to question nonconformity as a methodological approach to ethical encounter. I refer to Allan Kaprow’s ‘lifelike art’ (Kaprow, 1993) and mention Joseph Beuys’s ‘social sculpture’ (Beuys, 2008) suggesting that messing up distinctions between art and life questions art’s contribution to both art and society. I compare consensus and dissensus (Religious Society of Friends, 2005, Mouffe, 2008) in aiming for an ethical methodology that addresses rather than others mess (Law, 2008). I describe personal encounters with ideology and explore transgression (hooks, 1995, 133) and ‘reach’ (Bunting, 2008) as methods for resisting dogma. To examine tension and interaction (Livesey, 2010) I contrast the ethics of political proposals for cohesion (iCoCo, 2010) with Iris Marion Young’s suggested overlapping of community (Young, 1990). To demonstrate my speculative approach I refer to artists as stuttering guides (Olkowski, 1999, 15).

I discuss Emmanuel Levinas’s avoidance of assimilation (Veling, date unknown) and Young’s comments about difference in an urban setting to draw out comparisons with my own semi-rural experience (Young, 1990). I question my motivation as artist, citizen or activist and examine Grant Kester’s analysis (Kester, 2004, 118) of Mierle Laderman Ukleles’s ‘Touch Sanitation’ (1984) to clarify my position. I refer to BAVO (Bavo, 2009) and Patrick Simons’s contention that art in the community is meaningless when it lacks tension (Wild, 2011) to affirm the political effect of my quietly dissenting art practice.

In Chapter Four I explain how and why I site my practice in Readymade Situations. I refer to the Argentinian ‘Street Art Group’ (Valente, 2011) and BAVO (BAVO, 2007) to show how my approach of quiet activism (Eisenmann, 2007) draws attention to the overlooked. I refer to Ukeles’s Touch Sanitation (1984) to discuss how tension in the mainstream art world and the mess of argument and debate can lead to retrospective evaluation and the development of new meaning beyond the authoring artist’s intention. I investigate several artists’ use of bread, a familiar and essential medium, to discuss art practice in relation to day-to-day life and culture (Kaprow, 1993, CFU, 2002, Gloriousninth, 2009). I use Stephen Zepke’s comparison between the Duchampian and Guattarian understanding of the ‘readymade’ (Zepke, 2008) to demonstrate how my reflexive practice is embodied as gentle politics (Crouch, 2003). I refer to Nicolas Bourriaud’s term ‘social interstice’ (Bourriaud, 2002) in order to clarify my own preference for liminal process (Turner, 1969) that avoids the commodification of artist and artwork and, instead, embodies change. I cite Vilem Flusser’s suggested connection between exile and artist, (Flusser, 2004) and Rosi Braidotti’s ‘radical immanence’ as methodological means to non-hierarchical social change (Braidott, 2002) and describe a number of my projects to identify a position I have arrived at of immanent invisibility. I contrast works by other artists
(Sehgal, 2007, WochenKlausur, 1994-5) to clarify my choice to work mostly outside of institutional frameworks. I cite Stephen Wright’s ‘low co-efficient of visibility’ (Wright, 2008) to emphasize my letting go of intention and I refer to government initiatives (iCoCo, 2010 & Big Society, 2011) to demonstrate how my practice contests homogeneity. I refer to Deleuze & Guattari, (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004b, 10) and Flusser (Flusser, 2004) in concluding that an ethical, rhizomatic art practice, attending to the overlooked, requires *immanent invisibility*. 
Chapter One: Day-to-Day Becoming

1.1 Day-to-Day Process

The act of digging has been key to my research; digging to prepare the ground for crops and serendipitous gleaning, digging as a volunteer in Liverpool, helping towards the aim of clearing and opening up an eccentric network of underground tunnels as well as digging to fill in the graves of my friend from the woods and my father. Through acts of digging I have delved into memories, particularly of significant and exemplary friends and realised the significance of digging to unearth and digging to inter, which could equally be expressed as searching and finding, re-searching and letting go. Engaging with day-to-day cycles of life and death has developed into a relationship with ground and soil both literally and metaphorically⁴(http://www.laurawild.co.uk/skull/digging.html). It became apparent that an art practice, operating within day-to-day life, could allow for the possibility of transformation whilst reducing anxiety that often accompanies change.

*My allotment, or any other garden for that matter, was a place of perpetual change, whether I liked it or not. Nothing stayed the same even for a moment. I was constantly coming across the unexpected, particularly when digging. I found small living creatures going about their lives, indeed they were sometimes not so small. I unearthed a big fat toad that fell on its back, arms and legs flailing, until it regained its composure and found refuge in a nearby wall. I also discovered inanimate objects; rusty metal hinges, a spark plug, plastic bottles as well as two dead dogs⁵(http://www.laurawild.co.uk/skull/deaddogs.html). What tended to happen was that these ‘discoveries’ entered into my contemplations, ‘How did it get there? How long ago? Who would have put it there? Why so many worms just here?’*

I took up my allotment tenancy and first had to cut back brambles and other tall weeds that had established themselves over years of neglect. It then became possible to begin digging and in doing so I came to understand the nature of rhizomes, particularly in the form of nettles, bindweed and willowherb. Rhizomes produce underground shoots that adventitiously seek out ground in which to produce little roots and send up new plants. Where rhizomes differ from other plants is that even the tiniest fragment of underground stem has the potential for new growth. Digging and thereby breaking up a rhizomatic system results not in its obliteration but rather its propagation. In this sense the rhizome could be described as subversive. I understand Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the rhizome as metaphor. ‘The weed exists only to fill the waste spaces left by cultivated areas. It grows between, among other things’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004b, 20). I began, through the process of digging, to consider my patterns of thinking as rhizomatic, adventitious growth in previously uncultivated gaps. In terms of art practice this meant that through engaging in day-to-day processes I was beginning to question and explore

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⁴ http://www.laurawild.co.uk/skull/digging.html  
⁵ http://www.laurawild.co.uk/skull/deaddogs.html
beyond the visible, mainstream art world and, by letting go of preconception, discover what may otherwise have been overlooked.

Rain has softened the ground making digging an even more pleasurable activity. As I dug up a dock, levering it up with my fork, it made the oddest hollow cracking sound as though it were somehow connected to an underground tunnel. I also found a bone and, as always, wondered if it belonged to many more in the same bit of ground.

I’m digging thick yellow nettle roots that creep along just under the surface. These were, I remember, under a piece of old carpet that I presume was covering a compost heap. The nettles obviously found their way there and made themselves at home. Last year as I was cutting back the brambles, that entirely consumed my allotment when I took it on, I piled the fronds on top of this carpet on top of the nettles on top of the compost on top of the soil. The pile of brambles remained there rotting with new brambles and nettles growing up through them, that is until March this year when for my birthday present, my request, we hired a chipper and made this pile and others into sacks of chippings, on one of the wettest weekends of the year. So, this area I am digging has not seen the light of day for many a year until now, which adds to my curiosity as to what may be lurking in it (Wild, 2007, 10/05/07).

When I came across the work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles what initially interested me was her move away from the making of art objects to a practice that responded initially to her personal
life and then to her social environment (Ukeles, 1995). For the last forty years Ukeles has worked in collaboration with the New York Department of Sanitation and in particular the disposal of waste in landfill sites. However, unlike the majority of ‘land artists’ and ‘eco artists’ whose subject is the natural environment, her emphasis has been in the context of maintenance work and its effect upon society. Prior to the birth of her first child, in 1969, Ukeles’s art practice took the form of abstract expressionist painting and moved on to soft and inflatable sculpture. Her growing unease in making art objects that required cleaning and repair catalysed during her pregnancy causing her to examine, in particular, maintenance work in the home, which was then a focus for feminist debate. Ukeles described how she felt caught between the roles of artist, which was at that time understood to be about the expression of individualism and freedom, and her domestic role of looking after her family and home. In 1969 she wrote Manifesto (Ukeles, 1969) a document proposing that she, her husband and their child would live in the Museum of Culture as a live art exhibit, to demonstrate that Care (the proposed name for the exhibition) as an activity, could be art. She said, ‘My working will be the work’ (Ukeles, 1969). Ukeles sent a copy of a positive review in a local paper (Levin, 1984) to the Commissioner of the Sanitation Department. This resulted in her invitation to become the department’s unsalaried, ‘Artist in Residence’ (Moorman, 1984). Ukeles’s examination of the notion of artistic freedom, alongside her desire to close the cultural gap between maintenance and art, was her motivation for I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day (Felshin, 1995, 173). This project was in collaboration with staff that cleaned the ground floor of a large office building on a daily basis. Ukeles asked the workers to identify an hour, each day, when what they were doing was art rather than work. She visited the office daily, to photograph their process. She recorded the workers’ comments in response to her question as to whether they were, in that moment, working or making art. The resulting documentation was exhibited at a branch of the Whitney Museum in 1976. Encouraging people who would not have called themselves artists to describe what they were doing as art contradicted the accepted attitude of that time which separated art and artists from ordinary society. Ukeles’s I Make Maintenance Art One Hour Every Day (Felshin, 1995, 173) was therefore a direct challenge to carefully guarded cultural values. Ukeles’s aim was to bring art down to earth and eliminate existing cultural boundaries that set it apart from day-to-day life.

I have lived mostly in a rural or small town setting. Choosing to site my practice on an allotment reflects my positionality, as Ukeles’s working together with the Sanitation Department is a reflection of her position in the City of New York. On my allotment my practice was stripped of the forms of art I had previously practiced, such as painting and drawing, and was giving way to the performance of day-to-day gardening procedures, digging, cutting back, sowing and planting6 (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/pumpkin/process.html). I found that by paying attention to my actions I was making discoveries, not only about the history of the piece of land I was working but also about my responses to it. For six months immediately before taking up my allotment tenancy my

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6 [http://www.laurawild.co.uk/pumpkin/process.html](http://www.laurawild.co.uk/pumpkin/process.html)
practice included a daily dog walk in the park close to my home during which I photographed, from the same four positions, thereby building up a document of the changing seasons (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/potato/walking.html). What began to interest me about the process was how things occurred spontaneously on my walks and became more interesting than the photographs. I found my attention was attracted by slight happenings that altered my way of thinking, happenings that were obscured from my perception when the agenda was a more intentional photographic document.

I heard something plop into the river as I walked along the bank. I waited, wondering if the sound was made by fish, bird or rodent, but was not rewarded with a sighting. I was close to this spot on a previous day when I heard and saw a kingfisher rising out of the water. Standing there on the bank, pondering the surface of the water, I recognised it to be a limen between worlds inhabited by quite different kinds of creatures; there are some that depend on both water and air though usually one world is more familiar, less hostile, than the other… A day later… I thought I saw a trout jump out of the river twice the length of its body in distance and, just as I was mistrusting my vision, it did it again. I wondered at this but realised the previous day’s ambiguous sensing had inspired my imagination to contemplate further.

Whilst I was taking the daily photographs I would hope to be in the park alone to avoid any confrontation that may occur. Once I had decided to let go of the photographic routine I began to make friends with other dog-walkers who had been initially cautious of talking to me because they had seen me with my camera. They told me they had thought I was carrying out surveillance and therefore mistrusted me. One of my newfound friends was a retired farmer; she and I would walk the park together if we happened to be out at the same time. When one day my daughter brought home a day-old orphan duckling my new friend gave us the advice we needed to rear it until it was mature enough to release back to the river in the park (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/potato/george.html).

In the early stages of my research I discovered, through experience, that making paintings and other Fine Art objects created problems for a practice of process-led research, since the resulting objects contradicted my open-ended process of social interaction (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/potato/repetition.html). I gradually let go of object-making altogether but for a time I retained processes of weaving and pot-making and these products were absorbed into day-to-day life as gifts or items for sale or exchange on my Farmer’s Market stall. In this context the pots and mats I had made encouraged encounter with potential customers. In the course of a year I took my stall to market five times and also to the two-day agricultural show. The most enjoyable feature of market trading was exchanging goods with other stallholders and making part-exchanges, of rag for

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7 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/potato/walking.html
8 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/potato/george.html
9 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/potato/repetition.html
goods, with some of my customers. Making mats and pots for the monthly market was a means to encouraging encounter, in a day-to-day setting, but was keeping me inside my studio and limiting time for new interactions at the allotment\textsuperscript{10} (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/potato/market.html).

\textit{Having resolved not to agree to any more market days I was cajoled on one more occasion when told the egg lady’s stall was in need of occupation as her new hens weren’t yet laying. After relinquishing the market I returned to my allotment musings trusting that day-to-day life would present serendipitous opportunities for interaction.}

1.2 Habitual Process

Noticing what happens in process, being self-consciously attentive to one’s habitual gestures, is a key aspect in the work of Allan Kaprow whose book of essays examines the blurring of boundaries between art and life (Kaprow, 1993). Whilst his practice in the early days of Fluxus often involved many participants and ambitious projects known as ‘Happenings,’ Kaprow’s experiments became less dramatic towards the end of his career and demonstrated his desire for investigating artists’ systems of operating day-to-day. He began to write about this, in the early 1970’s, in his essays, \textit{Education of the Un-Artist} (Kaprow 1993, 97). Choosing day-to-day gesture, as the material for examination, he observed his own tooth brushing and handshaking, noting what happens if these actions are performed with attention rather than purely habitually. Kaprow welcomed unpredictability such as the slippage or breakdown of a system which, he determined, results in an unforeseeable process that can indicate strength, rather than weakness, in allowing for uncertainty (Morgan, date unknown). He acknowledged that people mostly choose to avoid uncertainty but described how he deliberately invented games for himself that forced him to address processes he would naturally evade, such as being unable to plan his life (ibid.). Kaprow explored an open-ended approach to living, he laid himself open to chance, spurning the anesthetic effects of habitual process and the pretence of being in control.

\textit{One day, when I was winding warp for my loom, something interesting happened. I was enjoying the rhythm of the winding when a thread slipped off one of the posts and broke the pattern. What surprised me about this was that I couldn’t then correct the mistake and resume the process; I was, momentarily, completely thrown off balance and could not remember which way to wind the thread around the posts.}

David Crouch is co-author of \textit{The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture} (Crouch and Ward, 1988). We met over lunch at a conference about art and allotments (Groundwork, 2006). He subsequently came to my allotment shed for a conversation about ‘becoming,’ particularly through the performance of mundane tasks\textsuperscript{11} (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/pumpkin/dc.html). Crouch is a

\textsuperscript{10} http://www.laurawild.co.uk/potato/market.html

\textsuperscript{11} http://www.laurawild.co.uk/pumpkin/dc.html
geographer and has researched the way people negotiate spaces and how this is worked out through ‘holding on’ and ‘moving forward’ which, though appearing to be contradictory are, Crouch describes, a double action. He explores this, in part, through disseminating the experiences of allotment gardeners whom he has interviewed about the ways in which they operate within the space of their allotments. He sees these experiences as being more complex than just ‘doing’ gardening and proposes that the space, together with the performance of tasks within it, provide the means to adjust and re-imagine one’s life (Crouch, 2006, unpaginated). Crouch suggests that whilst the seemingly ordinary actions of gardening a piece of ground could be felt to be a ‘holding on’ in the sense of a relationship of belonging between ground and gardener, it is through performance within this space that a ‘moving forward’ takes place (ibid.). Crouch cites examples of allotment tenants who describe their experience of working their plots as ‘uplifting’ and ‘stimulating,’ he says that it is in doing, or performing, that this discovery is made (ibid.). He suggests that cracks appear within the performance of habitual actions and argues that these cracks are the point at which significant change can take place (ibid.). My practice resonates with Crouch’s ‘holding on’ and ‘moving forward’ though I prefer to use the term ‘becoming’ suggesting developmental transformation without prescribing a particular direction. I am interested in whether ‘cracks in habitual acts’ (ibid.) could become gaps for encounter with others. My experience suggests that the act of keeping an allotment, with its inherent repetitive or habitual processes can, if performed attentively, like Kaprow’s tooth brushing (Kaprow, 1993, 219), provide the space for encounter with one’s own memories. Crouch says, ‘In the doing, moments of memory are recalled, re-activated in what is done’ (Crouch, 2006, unpaginated). Following the stirring of memory, through sensations remembered in my body as a result of re-enacted process, I have discovered possibilities for an intensity of encounter with memory in the performance of process. I have experienced ‘the liminality of performance in which the self/world is transformed’ (ibid.). I am interested to explore the difference between simply doing gardening and experiencing the transformation of embodied becoming; a difference marked by each individuals approach to acting attentively as opposed to habitually.

I’m sitting by my onion bed under the birch tree and amongst bluebells, nettles, brambles and willow herb, all about a foot high. After the council lorry left I sowed red and green cabbage in the centre of my main-crop potato and pea bed and three French beans in three wigwams, blue, green and red-striped (the beans not the wigwams). I bought these varieties thinking they would be interesting on my Farmers’ Market stall. I mulched the beans and strawberries that I’ve now un-cloched, then turned and activated the compost and now I’m back to my favourite occupation… digging. After only a short spell I feel calm and contemplative. If I were to compare gardening with painting then digging would be comparable to stretching and priming canvas and planting would be more like painting. I used to find the act of painting a stressful and angst-ridden activity, no wonder I subsequently enjoyed my job as technician. Nearly
3pm and I’m still here, thank goodness for instant soup. I’ve dug and planted the last corner of my onion bed, the soil is much lighter this end of the allotment. So much for imminent rain, it’s sunny and hot again. A bee, I think, keeps hovering beside me at head height then zipping off and re-appearing in front of me, it seems to be checking me out (Wild, 2007, 05/05/07) \(^{12}\) (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/poppy/bee.html).

John Berger describes the repetition of habit as a vital stage in positioning oneself in the world. He suggests that a cyclical nature of living is the means to a sense of security, borne out of habit. ‘Nevertheless, by turning in circles the displaced preserve their identity and improvise a shelter. Built of what? Of habits, I think, of the raw material of repetition, turned into a shelter’ (Berger, 2005, 64). Berger reflects that homelessness results in fragmentation and concludes that emigration represents entry into a fragmented existence, which leads him to suggest that habitual process is, therefore, a means to survival. Vilem Flusser, who is concerned with exile (enforced emigration), contradicts Berger’s argument suggesting that exile, when accepted optimistically rather than as a victim of circumstance, can determine a quality of life that is otherwise diminished by the comfort of habit. ‘Perhaps human dignity consists in not having roots’ (Fusser, 2004). Claire Carlisle, in the context of Buddhist philosophy, gives a clear description of our human need for habit in allowing us to perform day-to-day tasks without having to give everything our full attention (Carlisle, 2006, 79). Without tacit knowledge, gained through repetition, our daily tasks would be arduous and both time and energy consuming like Kaprow’s tooth brushing and handshaking that he deliberately performed attentively (Kaprow, 1993, 219). Through performing mundane tasks habitually we are able to consider other things but this has its drawbacks in that it causes us to become desensitised to our environment and relationships. In taking situations and people for granted, and becoming immune to realising our human vulnerability, we can experience disproportionate feelings of grief and loss when our circumstances alter, in particular with the death of a loved one. Carlisle proposes that by deliberately acting with awareness habits can gradually become unravelled (ibid.) since awareness (I prefer the term attention) functions as an antidote to the numbing of habit. The obscuring or desensitisation, of which Carlisle warns, derives from complacency within the very habitual acts that are initially crucial, as Berger suggests, to developing a sense of identity (Berger, 2005, 64). I am interested to note that my own response to being uprooted from Cornwall in 2004 and relocated to Derbyshire was to undertake and re-enact my daily circular walk around the park that resonates with Berger’s argument for establishing identity. However, I altered my process when the allotment opportunity emerged and relinquished my deliberately repetitive actions before they became meaningless through habit.

I do seem to be becoming absent-minded. I just started pouring boiling water into an empty coffee filter then heard myself self-reprimanding out loud. I know I talk to myself quite a bit these days, often when I’m walking in the park where, I like to think, having

\(^{12}\) http://www.laurawild.co.uk/poppy/bee.html
the dog with me provides an excuse. I have a resistance to anyone telling me how to contemplate or meditate. I used to put my resistance down to my mother, a yoga teacher, trying to make me 'salute the sun' in a morning when I was a teenager. In fact I think it's more to do with knowing, or having known inherently at a very young age, how to do these things without someone else's instruction but it having slipped out of focus. I was alone a lot as a child and lived pretty much in my own world of daydreams. I used to make things, dens and shelters, intimate environments in which to practice the art of daydreaming. As I'm sitting here quietly I've been joined by what I now see to be a female blackbird that is rustling about in the peas in front of me. So, this is the visitor who's been emptying some of my pea pods. It's gratifying to think that I'm providing a meal for others as well as myself. I've lopped several big branches off one of my elders to encourage it to grow closer to the ground so I can reach its flowers and fruit. I broke up the branches and twigs and added them to the pile and realise that I have created a small wildlife shelter. It's now overcast and a proliferation of midges have appeared so I'm beating a hasty retreat (Wild, 2007, 12/09/07).

1.3 Thinking, Re-membering and Becoming

Letting go was the context for my conversation with Anne, an educationalist, in my allotment shed\(^1\) (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/spade/shed.html). She and I had both recently experienced the upheaval of relocation and were finding solace in the action of digging our separate plots of ground; new to us but well worked and nurtured by previous inhabitants. Anne had moved into a house that the previous owner had occupied for sixty years. We compared our methods of digging and what happened to our thought processes as a result. Anne approached digging as a way to distract her mind from troubling thoughts whilst my experience was of digging-over issues in order to work through them and come to a new point of understanding. Whilst analysing the process I put into words an experience of recurrent thoughts that I have experienced when digging\(^2\) (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/skull/AT%20movie.html). I described to Anne how my recurrent thought seemed to be a threshold, to a deeper level of thinking, triggered within my body by physical action. I had found, in continuing to dig, that I moved beyond the recurrent thought, like crossing a threshold, and new thinking was then activated. Anne compared my experience to a meditation process. My conclusion is that a physical day-to-day process such as digging can, when engaged in attentively, have as significant an effect as the stillness of meditation. I observed a sentient rhythm that became manifest within my body during the physically demanding work of digging and, in the re-enactment of movements, each member of my body alerted my mind to a previous experience of this action resulting in re-membering.

\(1\) \[http://www.laurawild.co.uk/spade/shed.html\]
\(2\) \[http://www.laurawild.co.uk/skull/AT%20movie.html\]
Day-to-day gardening processes seemed to engender thinking and re-membering in a way that working inside a studio had not; it could be something that caught my eye or the scent of a flower at dusk, other times it was the way I was moving my body, the warmth of the sun or the chill of a frosty morning.

Unlike meditation, my mind did not become emptied and stilled but rather the rhythm of activity alerted a combination of memories, at the same time as occluding others, and when linked with my current thought resulted in clumsy, stuttering thinking. My walk in the park, when I heard a dis-embodied ‘plop’ in the river and the moment when the warp slipped, during my process of winding it for weaving (see Habitual Process) were, I suggest, examples of what Kaprow describes as ‘slippages’, or the ‘breakdown in systems of operation’ (Morgan, date unknown). I have discovered that embodied becoming involved for me a form of forgetting, letting go of control. I suggest therefore that messy, incoherent thinking, alerted by the process of remembering, can provide momentary gaps in which my imagination has freedom to explore.

On completion of digging and laying out dividers for my herb and salad bed I notice that my onions are starting to brown at the tips of their leaves. It’s odd how digging causes a kind of blindness to other tasks, but an open-ness to reverie…

…The sun is so bright today that I keep seeing fragments of straw (blown over from where they’re meant to be mulching my broad beans) and mistaking it for metal – how does my brain allow me to make this error of judgement at least three times? I wonder if magpies collect it for the same reason, rather than lambs eyes, a fact I was introduced to by a farmer-neighbour younger than I was ready for. I also found an object that seemed to resemble an animal’s tooth – this prompting reminded me of the day we took our eldest daughter, as a little girl, to see a dead whale, beached, near Penzance (Wild, 2007, 01/05/07).

Having discovered that day-to-day processes, such as digging, can create an environment favourable to the emergence of memory I refer to Marcel Proust’s experiments whereby he created environments conducive to the emergence of involuntary memory that took him into self-inflicted solitary confinement in a darkened room (Benjamin, 1992, 198). Proust was searching for happiness, ‘the hour that was most his own’ (ibid.). He found it in a combination of remembering and forgetting, ‘we might almost call it an everyday hour; it comes with the night, a lost twittering of birds, or a breath drawn at the sill of an open window’ (ibid.). Walter Benjamin compares Proust with Ignatius of Loyola (ibid, 207). A number of years ago I undertook the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. I learned that Loyola had an accident, which caused him to be bedridden for several months and during this time he discovered the territory of daydream in which he found that some types of daydreams could lead to a feeling of sadness and others to happiness. This ‘Discernment of Spirits’, as he described it, is understood as ‘Distinguishing between creative and destructive inner moods and feelings’ (Hughes 1985), and is the basic
aim of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. My practice of thinking, re-membering and becoming draws on the research of both Proust and Loyola, but differs in my choice to engage in active processes with a deliberate lack of intention regarding outcome.

I’ve just weeded, thinned and transplanted my red and green cabbages – a satisfying task as I was ambivalent about their germination only a few weeks ago. I’m hoping the same will happen with my squashes, pumpkins and courgettes that all seem to be reluctant to emerge. I could be feeling despondent about the amount there is to do and so now is the time to remind myself of why I’m here and to enjoy the wildness, its unpredictability and the fine line between success and failure. I certainly seem to be encouraging nature, so many birds and, yes, a ladybird feeding on the black-fly that arrived on just a few of my broad beans. The cabbages I transplanted seem to be playing dead, I’m hoping it’s just temporary shock. My rocket has failed to germinate and I’ve only one small coriander plant so I’ve sprinkled vast quantities of seed that I harvested two years ago and watered them in, hoping some of these will take instead (Wild, 2007, 10/06/07).

Working the ground has, I have found, potential for becoming, not just physically and mnemonically but also spiritually. At the age of thirteen, Cuban artist, Ana Mendieta was exiled to the USA because of her family’s opposition to the revolutionary government (Blocker, 1999). She spent the rest of her childhood in foster care. She expressed that her interactions within the natural world were for her a way of uniting her with the universe. She felt that at her birth she was ‘cast from the womb’ which, for her, represented nature and she was attempting to ‘become one with the earth,’ which she felt to be her maternal source (Jones, 2002, 59). She chose a ritualistic practice to re-establish her bonds with the earth.

![Figure 4: Untitled (Silueta series), Ana Mendieta, 1976](image)
Mendieta’s methods were not popular amongst early feminists who saw her deliberate use of trace, absence of her (female) body, as re-establishing the silence of women (Jones, 2002, 59). Her actions were interpreted as a self-inflicted absence from contemporary aesthetics and socio-political debate (ibid. 104). However Mendieta, who was not unsympathetic to the ideals of feminism, reasoned that her actions reflected her own ethnicity, which caused her to feel excluded, or ‘othered’, by the feminist movement that she experienced as predominantly white and middle class (ibid. 53). Ruth Jones, in examining ‘a feminine becoming’ (ibid.), comments that Mendieta’s absence could in fact be signifying her mobility, the fluidity of becoming, rather than her silence. She deliberately disallows her own ‘othering’ by being constantly elusive. Jones suggests that Mendieta’s work alerts us to ‘inter-subjective relationships between subjects and reciprocal relationships between subjects and the earth’ (ibid. 62). Mendieta’s practice of working the ground differs from mine in specifically seeking her own spiritual connection within the natural world; however, my practice corresponds in two ways with Mendieta’s. Firstly, in that I also work with the ground as a medium for fostering the conditions conducive to making connections through physical process. Secondly, that I locate my work within several discourses and ideologies, preferring a liminal position that allows me mobility and the ability to overlap with others. Julia Kristeva uses the liminal term ‘abyss’ which, she says, opens up between mother and child through the experience of pregnancy and childbirth. ‘What connection is there between myself, or even more unassumingly between my body and this internal graft and fold, which, once the umbilical cord has been severed, is an inaccessible other?’ (Kristeva, 1987, 254). I argue that severance and a continual process of letting go paradoxically determine the possibility for connection with others that, I suggest, occurs most profoundly in liminal situations.

I was recovering from a miscarriage and decided to visit the holy well in the hamlet of Alsia15 (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/alsia.html). I took with me a pair of baby’s boots and tied them into the hawthorn tree over the well. This was a tradition that had been practiced at this site for generations but usually in the context of the healing of diseases. The custom was to take a strip of cloth from the clothing closest to the diseased area in the belief that the disease would disappear when the cloth rotted. I wasn’t looking for miracles but found some comfort through the re-enactment of a folk custom. I was astonished when, some months later, I came across a drawing of Alsia well in a women’s diary (We’Moon, 1995, 65) given to me by a friend, that clearly showed my baby’s boots in the tree. I researched the artist, Monica Sjoo, and discovered in her obituary (West, 2005) that two of her sons had died in tragic circumstances. Of all the offerings, hanging in the tree, Sjoo had chosen mine to record in her drawing. It seems that my baby’s boots had gained their own agency as a result of being placed in this context (Wild, 2007, 03/03/08).

15 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/alsia.html
I have included this anecdote in order to introduce the notion of limen in the, more generally, recognised form of thresholds that are crossed during ceremonies or rites of passage. However, my main intention is to demonstrate that limen can be experienced in the process of day-to-day life. The action I performed at the well could be regarded as a ritual or rite of passage, a liminal process. In rites of passage the limen represents a transitional point at which the subject, usually publicly, becomes altered in some way, strange, even to themselves (Greenblatt, 1995, 29), a vulnerable position in which to find oneself and the reason why rites of passage are often recognised as spiritual occasions when an individual requires the support of their community. A re-enactment of this kind therefore becomes an affirmation of letting go for the individual concerned. I suggest that embodied becoming, as experienced in rites of passage, can occur less dramatically through day-to-day processes of thinking and re-membering.

It feels like weeks since I was last digging. In fact it is only four days. In the meantime I have been under the weather in more ways than one. The gales at the weekend, following an earthquake last Wednesday, were astonishing; I called on Sunday to check my shed was still in one piece after losing a window last winter. This morning we woke up to a blizzard but it had all gone by mid-morning giving way to a beautifully sunny, though cold, day. I can now see dark clouds looming and wonder if there’s more snow on its way. I have just inspected the hibernating hedgehog because I could see that
some of it’s moss covering had moved. There was a hole at one side of the mound into which I peered. I saw spines and so carefully covered it with another generous helping of moss. I hope it is still alive in there. There was a stall on the market this morning selling seed potatoes and onion sets, so I bought a bag of Desiree, I can’t find Dave’s recommendation of Pomeroy anywhere, and a small bag of shallots that I will need to find a corner for… (Wild, 2007, 03/03/08)

…Spring must be here because the hibernating hedgehog has woken and wandered off. I’m so happy that it has survived winter in the environs of my allotment. I have planted sweet peas along the wire fence that I repaired and provided each seed with a raspberry cane to climb up. I have less seed than I need for the length of bed, so I’ve planted one at each cane instead of the recommended two and hope they will all be productive. My bungalow neighbour has asked me to buy him some canes to support his beans. Another neighbour who allows me use of her bonfire site stopped for a chat and was saying that she hadn’t heard if she was able to have the allotment she applied for. I suggested she ring and remind them about it. Sure enough, a little later she hailed me to say ‘I’ve got it!’ I was so happy for her and congratulated her as enthusiastically as if she had just given birth to a third child (Wild, 2007, 11/03/08).

1.4 Gleaning

I often came across objects when I was digging and began to make a collection. I had done the same some years previously when gardening another patch of land that I had rented in Newlyn, Cornwall. I had negotiated with a neighbour the use of some land behind the house we were living in and was digging up the most insidious rhizome I’ve ever encountered; bamboo. This was when I discovered the joy of digging. The patch I was working had obviously been used as a rubbish tip. I dug up some strange metal objects that may have originated from the harbour below, also some tiles from an Edwardian fireplace and my most intriguing find, a discarded empty tube of oil paint

[http://www.laurawild.co.uk/skull/harold.html](http://www.laurawild.co.uk/skull/harold.html). The evident mnemonic capacity of a found, or re-discovered, yet previously overlooked, object was unexpectedly brought to my attention on another occasion during my research.

**After moving from Cornwall to Derbyshire, I was unpacking in my studio and lifted out of a box what I took to be the cast of my face, made with the help of an artist neighbour in St.Ives some eight years previously. I then came across a second face cast and realised I’d been mistaken as this second one was mine. Strangely I’d forgotten and suddenly remembered something now quite significant. My friend, Silver, lived in a caravan on a scrap yard at which he worked. A friend of his had cast his face for him and he gave it to me, thinking I might want it, saying, ‘You’re an artist, you’ll do something with it’. We were, then, working on a collaborative project at the scrap-yard**

[16](http://www.laurawild.co.uk/skull/harold.html)
about transformation with the passing of time. This took the form of a project in which I was documenting Silver’s working processes. Some months later he was working alone at the yard, repairing the underneath of an old but recently acquired portacabin when the jack supporting it gave way and he was crushed to death.

At the time I re-discovered Silver’s cast I happened to be reading an interview with Deleuze about the biography he wrote two years after Michel Foucault’s death in which he says, ‘When someone you like and admire dies you sometimes need to draw their picture. Not to glorify them, still less to defend them, not to remember, but rather to produce a final likeness you can find only in death, ‘that makes you realise that’s who they were’. A mask, or what he himself called a double, an overlay’ (Deleuze, 1995, 102). Deleuze’s reflections on Foucault’s death were the timely prompt I needed for realising Silver’s likeness and I began working with the cast of his face. This object had become loaded with significance in the light of his physical absence. I wondered how I would react to the mould being broken and the unfolding of familiar features but found myself surprisingly detached and ambivalent. Some days later, alone in my studio, I began to carve away the imperfections of the casting process, a strangely comforting and reassuring action until I had to stop because I cut my thumb. This minor accident caused me to wonder at the latent effect of the object I was working with. I recognised in this moment how objects associated with the death of an individual, particularly objects that have enclosed the body, such as clothing, have heightened emotive potential (Hallam and Hockey, 2001, 212). Hallam and Hockey, in writing about the trappings of death, suggest that objects like Silver’s cast, that have contained the body of a loved one, exist in a limen between somewhere familiar and somewhere very unfamiliar and for this reason it is as though objects such as these have life after death (ibid.). With this in mind, when I began to discover overlooked objects during the process of digging, these items of rubbish, that had deliberately or accidentally been buried in a random kind of landfill process, presented themselves to me as catalysts for becoming.

I came to regard finding other people’s leftovers as a process of gleaning that occurs in a time and space between the person who left something and the one who claims it. I used these objects collaboratively in creating playful narratives, rendering valuable what another had considered dispensable. There was a subversive pleasure to be had in working, together with others, to examine and imaginatively engage with fragments of rubbish as though they were priceless treasure. It would be wrong to romanticise the notion of gleaning since it is a process usually associated with poverty and, as demonstrated by Agnes Varda’s film, closely related to tragedy (Varda, 2000). However, gleaning also describes a process of exacting research, making discoveries that have been
otherwise overlooked as irrelevant or unsavory. It is with this notion of gleaning that I draw connections with Allan Kaprow’s *Trading Dirt* (Kelley, 2004, 212), an example of a project that, in my opinion, embodies the spirit of gleaning. Kaprow embarked on an open-ended, fairly random, experiment that involved utilising soil, or ‘dirt’ as he calls it, a material with connotations of abjection.

![Fig. 6. Bucket and Dirt, Allan Kaprow, Photo by Robert Cook, 1993](image)

The project began as a whimsical idea upon waking, one morning in 1983 (Kelley, 2004, 212). Kaprow dug a bucketful of soil from his garden and placed it, together with a shovel, in his truck with the intention of exchanging it, sometime, for someone else’s soil. Thus followed a period of forgetfulness and several months before an exchange was realised. The exchanges continued intermittently for three years and the ending was decided upon when Kaprow moved house and the final bucketful of soil was laid to rest in the garden from whence the first had come. The action was playful but serious which allowed for a response that was light-hearted at the same time as heart-felt (ibid, 214). Kaprow’s co-collaborators exchanged soil from places of importance to them, which included places of spiritual significance, even sites of burial (ibid.). Kaprow was not being flippant in his proposal, the soil he initially took from his garden was good quality soil that he had been working and nurturing over a period of time and was, therefore, already invested with value.

I invited a group of live art students, from Sheffield Hallam University, to join me on my allotment. I had heard that they had been working closely in a live art context, with artist and
tutor Hester Reeve, and had therefore formed a bond. I wondered whether their connection to each other would translate into interesting work at my allotment. In preparing for their visit I decided it was best not to plan too much but, rather, to see what would happen. I vaguely had in mind that we could begin with a guided tour and possibly make string and tea from nettles.

It was 1st June and sunshine was attempting to break through into a misty morning when five students and their tutor arrived at my allotment. Louis, a photographer, Dave, a filmmaker, Nat, Jo and Phoebe. We ate cake, discussed some possibilities and decided, since it was 7:00am and my allotment was flanked on one side by three elderly people’s bungalows, to conduct a guided tour in whispers. I led the way and whispered to Jo a description of various things I wanted to draw their attention to. Jo then whispered this and a little more to Nat, and Nat to Hester, then Hester finally to Phoebe who whispered the resulting metamorphic ‘story’ to the camera ($^{20}$ http://www.laurawild.co.uk/hinge/shu.html).

My concerns as a practitioner are with finding a connection between artist and collaborator, a connection that allows opportunity for art to occur in a limen, or interstice. The purpose of an object in this context tends to be as catalyst not as the embodiment of cultural value in itself. Experiences of art within this scenario can be, I have found, adventitious for artist and collaborator as evidenced with the students, and their tutor, on my allotment and in Allan Kaprow’s Trading Dirt (Kelley, 2004, 212). I repeated the serendipitous story making which emerged from my allotment, on various subsequent occasions, with adjustments relevant for each given situation. The next opportunity presented itself when a gallery in Sheffield hosted an evening of live art events and accepted my proposal to bring my wheelbarrow full of soil from my allotment. The soil had hidden within it a number of the objects that I came across whilst digging. These bits of other people’s rubbish, having been buried and subsequently unearthed, embodied a certain agency for imaginary narrative. I invited the audience to wear a pair of gardening gloves and join me in adapting the games of ‘lucky dip’ and ‘chinese whispers’ (‘telephone’ in the USA), and to collaboratively create, and then record, stories inspired by objects from the wheelbarrow ($^{21}$ http://www.laurawild.co.uk/hinge/bloc.html). I was sceptical beforehand as to how well this action would be received in a gallery context. However, not only were people willing and inventive in their narratives but more significant was the level of interaction as the stories unfolded. Strangers became friends in the process and friends engaged with each other differently in listening attentively to one another ($^{22}$ http://www.laurawild.co.uk/hinge/bloc.html).

I was discovering that my allotment, when viewed as palimpsest, contained layers of possibility. The worthless, discarded objects that I had gleaned whilst digging had, through an accidentally alchemical process, developed their own agency and become catalysts for re-search. Following the example of Allan Kaprow I was indulging my delight at discovering objects and allowing

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$^{20}$ http://www.laurawild.co.uk/hinge/shu.html
$^{21}$ http://www.laurawild.co.uk/hinge/bloc.html (movie on right)
$^{22}$ http://www.laurawild.co.uk/hinge/bloc.html (movie on left)
others to experience their agency by setting them to work in the form of a game (Morgan, date unknown). My materials were of no monitory value, often they were actual rubbish, and yet emerged as vehicles for meaning, through a collaborative process of story making, that was relatively hands-off on my part. I began to wonder at my own passivity, questioning what constituted art in my practice. My role as artist was altering in ways I could not have predicted. Through practicing day-to-day processes I seemed to be opening myself, and others, to possibilities for serendipity.

A few months later I took a bag of objects and gardening gloves with me to a group I belonged to that met bi-monthly in York. The meetings took place in a room at ‘The Retreat,’ a psychiatric hospital where two of our group were employed. We had come together to share, across disciplines, an experience of each other’s working processes. Most of the group worked in the field of mental health, or counselling of some kind. We had agreed to each present a contribution from our own practice for the rest of the group to experience. Over the period of a year we were guided through drama therapy, art therapy, a writing workshop and a dream workshop. The room we met in was not large and, for my story making process to work, we had to whisper to each other and then into the computer to record the event. These stories were markedly different to the ones that emerged on the allotment and at the gallery in Sheffield. A serendipitous outcome resulting from this event was one of the group members feeling inspired to write a book of stories for children based on those that emerged during the evening. Her intention was to collaborate with me in providing an opportunity for children to engage in the story making process inspired by the (as yet unpublished) stories of Granny Hush (Glasson & Wild, 2008). These stories could be regarded as a rhizomatic outgrowth from the original game played by the students who visited my allotment a year before.

In this chapter I have related events leading up to my allotment tenancy. I have demonstrated how and why it became necessary for me to let go of object-making processes and to engage instead in day-to-day activities such as a daily walk which, once free from art processes such as photography, presented opportunities for exchange. I have investigated how, when digging my allotment, I began to experience an open-ended, embodied becoming by allowing the emergence of memory and its development through re-membering, into new thinking. Unlike the studio the allotment continued to alter in my absence, as well as presenting me with possibilities, thus functioning in the way of a collaborator. I have begun to explore loss and the notion of gleaning as catalytic, revealing liminal processes for becoming in day-to-day life. The more I engaged in the processes of the allotment, and associated activities, the more I seemed to come to accept situations over which I had no control and which alerted me to my own subjective becoming. Common to encounters I have acknowledged, individually and collectively, is an attitude of passivity and lack of control resulting in letting go. I do not consider these

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http://www.laurawild.co.uk/ball/yorkwisp.html

http://www.laurawild.co.uk/ball/nephew.html
inactivities to be submissive acceptance of the status quo but rather willingness to be sensitive to, though not necessarily accepting of, others’ entrenched beliefs whilst examining and adjusting my own.

I arrived here at about 2.45pm for the last bit of daylight after delivering our middle daughter to Manchester airport destined for five months in Finland. I needed to be here to get myself grounded after an emotional ‘au revoir’. The Met office is forecasting sub-zero temperatures soon so I’m digging urgently. I have begun to define the top edge of my broad bean beds, which has meant clearing the bank of michaelmas daisy roots. In doing this I have discovered the cowslips that have delighted me two springs in a row. I therefore dug these, cleared their roots of bindweed and replaced them more or less where I found them since I’m assuming they are self-sown and therefore like growing where they are. Whilst shaking the soil out of one of these plants I found a tiny horse shoe that I decided to replant under the said cowslip and to conduct some research into folk lore as to whether this may have been deliberately placed thus by a previous occupant. Tonight I am planning to continue reading Levinas’s philosophy of ‘the face’ (Levinas, 1988) as my reading this morning has caused me to wonder if there is some relevance for my meetings with people here at the allotment. Wondering if my little bird has alighted in Copenhagen yet, the first leg of her flight to Finland (Wild, 2007, 02/01/08).

Fig.7. Horseshoe and cowslips, Laura Wild, 2007
Chapter Two: Face-to-Face Encounter

2.1 Negotiating Boundaries

I took on my allotment in March 2007 and spent my first season clearing just enough space, in the middle of my plot, to dig four beds for growing crops. I deliberately left some tall weeds, such as willow herb, to act as a screen and protect my privacy. This proved my most productive year in terms of crops harvested, but I discovered self-sufficiency to be an isolating practice. In subsequent growing seasons, once I had become aware that my boundaries were causing certain issues for my neighbours, I spent a substantial amount of time clearing the edges of my plot, which had the effect of opening up my processes to the attention of those around me. On my first day at the allotment a man had been insistent that I must never have any sort of bonfire as his wife was an asthma sufferer, a rule I adhered to stringently until the day they moved house. The ‘no bonfire’ man, as I came to refer to him, was cynically commenting on my absence one day in the early summer and I told him I was busy working on my report for University. Since then he asked me about what I was studying and subsequently treated me more respectfully. I began to enjoy interaction with other allotment tenants and neighbours and found satisfaction in processes that were about community building and keeping the peace.

I’ve just dug out some pre-historic nettle roots… Tiny, the cat, has climbed onto my lap and is head-buttining my writing hand… Cat’s bored now, gone to peruse the neighbour’s allotment. The ancient nettles I’ve been tackling are at the furthest, lower corner of the allotment, close to my rhubarb and Jerusalem artichoke and encroaching into my bungalow-neighbour’s lawn along with thistles, teazles and bindweed. Whilst I was working, more over his side of the non-existent wire fence than my own, I realised that I seem to be concerned with boundaries. I’m thinking that rather than working from the middle of the allotment to the edge (and never getting there), I could work in reverse to establish clear, yet friendly, boundaries. I’ve been upset this year by one of my neighbour’s ill-considered boundary matters and this has convinced me to take note of reasonable requests and act on them as soon as possible. This will include pruning my damson tree that disturbs a neighbours view of the hills as well as cutting back the trees and nettles from my side of the main path so that a fellow allotmenteer who mows the path can get in closer to the wall (Wild, 2007, 02/10/07).

It was during my first autumn at the allotment that I began inviting some of the people I had recently met, and whose research interests resonated with my own, to talk with me in my shed; two of whom I have referred to in Chapter One. Most of the conversations have been with people researching within disciplines other than art and have therefore involved negotiation and overlapping of disciplinary boundaries. In my introduction I discussed Martin Davies’s term ‘ecology of knowledge’, characterized by a reflexive practice (Davies, 2003, 10). Davies suggests that thinking, when confined within a discipline, is inclined not to reflect upon itself or
beyond itself. A discipline prescribes certain rules and meanings, requiring the adherent to conform to these, and a reflexive approach is therefore hindered (ibid.). Allan Kaprow wrote about the advantages of combined disciplinary thinking and introduced the terms ‘admixture’ and ‘intermedia’, which he used to describe, what he considered necessary, contamination of the disciplines (Kaprow, 1993, 105). My own reflexive approach is softer, more congenial than Kaprow’s, confrontational, activist methodology but is indebted to, and builds upon, the model he introduced in the early 1970’s.

The first conversation in my shed was with Methodist Minister, and theologian, Barbara Glasson. Barbara is also concerned with boundaries and we discovered a shared interest in allowing events to unfold rather than attempting to overly control situations. Barbara drew comparisons between her recent visit to South African townships, where boundary issues were a matter of life and death, and her own working environment in Liverpool where she managed an in-between space, called ‘Somewhere Else’, a place ‘safe enough for people to be able to be themselves’ (Glasson, 2006). Barbara’s emphasis as a theologian differs from mine as an artist in her understanding and hopes for shared becoming. Barbara visited me a number of times at the allotment and we have continued to collaborate in a number of other projects. During Barbara’s visits, alongside our conversation, we usually performed an activity together such as cooking and eating, planting potatoes or making paths.

Once we had done our talking and become shivering with cold in the shed we decided, until it was turning dusk, to walk the paths between my freshly dug beds in order to compress the soil. Whilst we did this we discussed the symbolism of walking over the same piece of ground in terms of theology, philosophy and art. Barbara was talking about pilgrimage and the focus on destination within that concept and we recognised ours was an act of transgression against the linear, purpose-driven, patriarchal model of pilgrimage since we were walking, then re-walking, over and over again and, in the process, the path itself was becoming something different. My thoughts were about how I was in the process of letting go, not just of art processes such as painting, but also of intention and outcome, and instead being open to what might happen. We set the string to mark two more beds and two more paths, duly walked these also and then it was dark. As we walked towards the car the rain began to fall and continued all night.

By overlapping our very different practices, through Barbara’s visits to my allotment, her collaboration in several story-making events, and my visits to her community in Liverpool, we enlarged our own and each other’s perspectives. Barbara brought her insight and writing to my art practice and my artful encounters contributed to her theological reflections. Subsequently, Barbara has published ‘A Spirituality of Survival’ (Glasson, 2009) in which she has written about our meetings on
my allotment as a means of bringing her readers back to day-to-day life, after a guided tour through a variety of traumatic situations 26 (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/ball/sos.html). The book describes a process of recovery, from trauma, as surviving from underneath (Glasson, 2009, viii). On one occasion, when I was with Barbara’s community in Liverpool, I was expressing a sense I had of feeling at home in Liverpool in a way that is unusual for me in city centres. Barbara commented that it was because I had ‘arrived from underneath’, she suggested I had been ‘digging in Derbyshire and come up in Liverpool’. I had arrived and been welcomed into the midst of an existing community, as opposed to visiting the city as a tourist.

Fig.8. Planting potatoes with Barbara on my plot, Laura Wild, 2008

I cleared the boundary between my allotment and the bungalow of one of my neighbours. This was supposed to be a fence made from posts and galvanised wire, but it was long since gone and was instead a boundary of shrubs and teazles. Having been enlightened to the fact that teazles encourage bees, I was amused to think that they also encourage a kind of cross-pollination between people (Wild, 2007, 13/11/07).

I decided to welcome interruptions that began to occur, in the form of conversations, over the fences or walls that separated my plot from my neighbours. A number of years ago I read an essay by Alice Walker about her writing of ‘The Colour Purple’ (Walker, 1984). I was moved by the intensity with which she described her setting up of an ideal time and space in which to write, alone, but how it was when her daughter unexpectedly arrived, disturbing her peace, that her characters began to appear and speak to her, making the process of writing possible. I often think of this when interrupted in a task. I gradually began talking openly about my allotment

26 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/ball/sos.html
processes, as research, to my allotment neighbours. Attending to my physical boundaries, was how this process started as it literally brought me closer to other people.

2.30am - Something happened to me today. I was writing in my studio, heard Sandy growl and turned to see him run to the end of the garden, I leaned out of the window and shouted, assuming he’d been chasing a cat that was still in the tree he was looking up at. A man, whose garden backs onto ours came towards him and the boundary hedge, saw me at the window, and was saying something that I couldn’t make out so I ran downstairs and outside, in my socks. I was spilling out words like cat...dog...tree and he, holding the remains of a glass of beer looked me straight in the eye and told me his name and asked for mine and then the dog’s and then indicated the football that was behind me; the reason, I had completely missed, for our meeting. As I handed over the ball there were more words about ‘changing goalkeepers’ and I asked his name again, and if he lived in the house (there were several people in the garden, one of their noisier days) and I said how silly it was that we’d not met before and he said ‘it’s because of these trees in the way’ and I said, ‘as you can see I’ve been cutting them back to make more room,’ there was a split second’s pause and then I said my name again and Steve’s and that our three daughters are grown and gone and he casually reflected something about it being quiet for us now then, and something I missed about parties, and smiled, and we parted. I went inside and Steve said ‘what was all that about?’ and it felt like the moment in ‘The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe’ (Lewis, 1979) when Lucy finds herself back in the room, after her first visit to Nania, when time had stood still. And now I am unable to sleep and thinking about it, an unremarkable happening, ordinary and yet altering. And I’ve got up for my notebook and pen so as to record the associated thoughts of other significant encounters. Steve, an introduction, a meeting of difference. My friend in the woods saying ‘I was just thinking about you’. Silver walking into the room like someone from a previous history. Andy’s first lecture and his comments about ‘lifelike art’. Anne, a meeting, then a gift of seedlings and seeds. Barbara, an unprecedented meeting leading to multiple collaborations. Donald saying, ‘tell me about Laura’. My dad on his deathbed, eyes smiling.

I ask myself what all these face-to-face encounters contain? Alterity, otherness, difference, an implied and yet unspoken promise of more, whilst incorporating a sense of vulnerability. I have come to understand a paradox of mystery and de-mystification that occurs when negotiating boundaries; epitomised by the early days on my allotment, my imaginary thoughts of the people ‘on the other side’ and then the building of day-to-day friendships.
2.2 Gift or exchange

During the 1990’s, when painting was my art practice, I earned the money I needed for materials by working as a life model. I worked for two individual artists, for almost ten years, on and off. They were markedly different experiences and both turned into friendship. The first came to refer to me as muse, a term I was never altogether comfortable with, whereas the second saw me as a partner in the creative process and representations of my body became metaphors for this artist’s own life experience. The first paid me in cash and with the second we negotiated an exchange; I used this artist’s printmaking studio and expertise in exchange for modelling. The first artist usually asked me for seated or reclining poses whereas the second visualised women as powerful and active. Working for the first artist was emotionally challenging, working for the second was physically demanding. With each there were rituals played out in time, the repetition of a weekly activity, being in their respective spaces and the making and drinking of tea. Conversation was crucial to the first artist during the drawing and for the second in between drawings. Over the years, as I became more confident in my own art practice the first artist showed little interest in my work, but occasionally gave me materials, whereas the second became my mentor27 (http://laurawild.blogspot.com/2008/01/story-unfolds.html).

Comparative reflections have clarified my understanding of these two working relationships and help me make sense of working dynamics in more recent collaborative partnerships. The abandonment of money in favour of exchange proved mutually beneficial for the second artist, and myself, enabling access to services that otherwise would have been beyond both our means financially. More significantly, and partly due to the absence of money, respect for one another’s strengths and vulnerabilities resulted in a connection between us and created an environment where it was safe to ask for, and offer, supportive friendship in decisions about our work. In working with the first artist, a seemingly straightforward artist/model arrangement became more awkward with time. As we grew to know each other better through listening to each other’s life experiences, we both became more sensitive to our different roles of passive nude and active artist. What occurred were shifts in our awareness and we made adjustments accordingly. The situation of partnership, in which the first artist was in control and I was passive, altered as it became apparent to us both that my presence was more dominant than either of us had expected. This artist was able to rationalise the situation from their position by use of the term ‘muse’, which granted me influence, whilst keeping me passive, thereby allowing the artist total control over the working process. I became more uncomfortable within the situation, being employed to be passive, and our working relationship gradually petered out.

27 http://laurawild.blogspot.com/2008/01/story-unfolds.html (see Appendix 1.3)
I recently encountered a friend I hadn’t seen for some time, a live artist and dancer who had worked for me, as model, in three different situations. The first time I made drawings of him was in a life class setting when I was one of about a dozen other artists who wanted to experiment with making work involving movement. He was powerfully present in this setting and inspired some unusual and remarkable work from us all. The second environment was an artist’s studio, surrounded by fields, where I was invited to join the other two artists who shared this workspace. In discussing the pose I expressed that I wanted to make drawings reflecting the nature of vulnerability in terms of homelessness, which was the nature of the work I was making at that time. His response was to produce enigmatic poses that precisely inspired the work I was hoping for. The last setting in which we worked together was my own studio where I employed him to work with me one-to-one towards paintings and sculptures around the theme of homelessness. We negotiated a warm friendship and the work was a reflection of this.

I have cited these working relationships to explore the territory that particularly interests me, working together with others face-to-face, in an attitude of exchange, whereby each subject is actively collaborative, undiminished by the other. In the summer of 2006 I explored gift and exchange as part of my day-to-day process at the allotment with a project I called A Dozen Gifts And An Exchange28 (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/pumpkin/dozen.html). I had read Marcel Mauss’s theory that gifts demand reciprocity (Mauss, 1993) and I wanted to test this, through practice, against Elizabeth Grosz’s ideological hypothesis, of ‘absolute generosity’ (Grosz, 1999, 11).

‘What would an ethics be like that, instead of seeking a mode of equivalence, a mode of reciprocity or calculation, sought to base itself on absolute generosity, absolute gift, expenditure without return, a pure propulsion into a future that does not rebound with echoes of an exchange dictated by the past?’ (Grosz, 1999, 11)

Mauss makes it clear that giving and receiving is a complicated business. In his opinion, the recipient of a gift will find himself or herself indebted to the giver. He suggests that indebtedness is the giver’s intention (Mauss, 1993, 65). I was surprised by this suggestion of inequality in the act of giving and was hoping to arrive at a less cynical conclusion. However, I discovered that when I gave people bundles of produce, wrapped in my hand-woven mats the result was not necessarily the interaction I had anticipated. Even though my gift was not, as Mauss suggested, intended to create a feeling of indebtedness in the person gifted, I discovered that my intentions were not transferable and that instead the gift tended to cause a closing down rather than an opening up to interaction. This was the reason why I made a decision to allow ‘gift’ to give way to ‘exchange’ as an element of my practice. Mauss’s theory of anticipated reciprocity (ibid, 65) is not just about financial gain or personal status, as I had understood from the text, but is also about allowing for community collaboration. In giving without return, Mauss says, the receiver is

28 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/pumpkin/dozen.html
disempowered, he actually uses the word ‘wounded’ (Mauss, 1993, 65) whereas when allowing for reciprocation the act of giving necessitates negotiation and is, therefore, a means to interaction. I was beginning to understand that in the subtleties of exchange, whether of goods or dialogue, a real sense of collaboration could be experienced. I found the simple sharing of produce, a familiar form of giving from an allotment tenant resulting from surplus crops, was uncomplicatedly received without the need for reciprocation since the recipient understood their role in helping me not to be wasteful. I was rewarded with conversation and trust. I found that exchange offered a more equal position for both parties but required a continual and magnanimous negotiation of terms in order for collaboration to develop.

I've spent the last two days at home waiting for a significant, unrequited, pause in the rain. I decided, last night, to come here this morning regardless of the weather and it seems to have been a good decision as there's been only one brief shower in three hours despite a glowering sky. I'm very conscious of my neighbours since my plot has turned into a wilderness, a wonderful, fruiting, flowering wilderness but from outside I realise it communicates a total lack of control. This, of course, isn't of great concern to me but I appreciate I am unusual in my approach to gardening. So I decided, during a fit of paranoia, to engage in some community-building and delivered broad beans and raspberries as well as sunflower and tomato plants to my bungalow neighbours. This gesture has been very well received. As well as this I've been ‘grasping nettles’, a therapeutic activity, and filling one of the three sections of my compost bin. Now I'm wondering where to plant my cucurbit (marrow, pumpkin, squash) and brassica (kale, turnip, broccoli) seedlings. There's digging to be done! I'm wondering how my rhubarb is coming on but visiting it would involve negotiating a spiky, impenetrable jungle of thistle, nettle and teasel and will have to wait for another day... Just had a friendly visit from one of the recipients of my harvest earlier who'd come to thank me again and see what I'm up to. I showed her round as far as possible and asked her to tell me if anything my side of her fence ever causes her a problem. She assured me she's very easy going, 'if you enjoy it that's everything', was her comment on my preference for digging rather than mechanically rotavating (Wild, 2007, 04/07/07).

My gifts from the allotment demonstrated to me that abstract ideas are insufficient unless tested practically. I discovered that in this context Grosz's hypothesis of 'expenditure without return' (Grosz, 1999, 11) demands the equal agreement of both giver and recipient and yet even with an agreement of equality, Mauss suggests, there still exists an expectation of reciprocation of some kind, particularly in the mind of the 'wounded' recipient of charity (Mauss, 1993, 65). The gift, he says, would always embody the identity of the giver. Jacques Derrida considers the notion of gift to be an aporia in that gift becomes exchange as soon as it is reciprocated, even in anticipation of reciprocation (Vasseleu, 1998, 63). For Derrida, a gift can only be a gift if giver and recipient hold no account or discourse whatsoever since even a memory of the gift could
result in a sense of debt or sacrifice. Most importantly, both Mauss and Derrida agree that a gift given and received between two subjects creates a situation of inequality in which difference is exaggerated rather than diminished (ibid.).

At this point I will re-introduce Julia Kristeva to the discussion (see Chapter One, *Thinking, Remembering, Becoming*). Kristeva asks a rhetorical question, as to what connection there is between a mother and child after the severance of childbirth (Kristeva, 1987, 254). She says, ‘The child, whether he or she, is irremediably an other’ (ibid, 255). Kristeva describes the division between mother and child as an abyss. I argue that Kristeva’s ‘abyss’ (ibid.) determines the conditions for connection with alterity in the form of encounter with another. A gift, given and received, connects giver and recipient but exacerbates their relationship of difference. The possibility of unencumbered connection requires severance and a continual process of letting go in order to negotiate the limen in which a more collaborative encounter can take place. I conclude, therefore, that ‘absolute generosity’ (Grosz, 1999,11), rather than being embodied in a gift, is more likely to take place in the act of letting go, setting free. I would suggest therefore that in letting go of a desire for connection with another, the possibility of a genuine encounter opens up.

### 2.3 Risking Encounter

A man who lived alone in one of the bungalows told me one day that he was very sad as his sister-in-law who he’d been nursing was having her life-support machine switched off. I promised to invite him up to my plot for a cup of tea. On another occasion he asked about my research and was interested and open to the idea of transformation through day-to-day activity. A woman, whose garden met my plot at an adjoining fence, occasionally arrived to see what I was up to and shared with me that she was recovering from having ‘trouble with her nerves,’ the reason why she and her husband moved to this bungalow a year previously. When I told her I was an artist she invited me into her home to see her collection of finely painted eggshells that she said she had made when her eyesight was better. Each eggshell was the surface for a painting of a bird or small animal apart from one, which had an opening in it and contained all the elements of a tiny Christmas nativity. I felt moved by the trust and intimacy in our interaction.

I had found that when I decided to engage in exchange, rather than presenting people with gifts, I was rewarded with trust. This reminded me of my photographic project, during my daily walk in the park (see Chapter One, *Day-to-day Process*). Once I had decided to abandon the project other walkers then felt they could trust me, they found me more approachable without my camera. We formed a connection in simply taking our dogs for their daily exercise. From my perspective, also, the intention to take photographs from the same four positions was an
obstacle to interaction as the task was less complicated when I was alone in the park. The subtleties of negotiating this shared space on a day-to-day basis were obscured to me when my intention was the making of visible art. I began to wonder whether art, in the form of encounter, could in fact be taking place between others and myself in ordinary day-to-day situations rather than, as I had previously understood, between others and my artwork, independently from me. I decided to attend to encounters occurring in my day-to-day life, in particular those taking place at the allotment, alongside re-examining significant previous encounters. I looked for opportunities locally to interact with others and took my market stall to the agricultural show as well as some of my garden produce for the assessment of the horticultural section’s judges, with the intention of experiencing the local show community from the inside, not from a desire to compete.

When I took my ‘wild-eyedeer’ stall to Bakewell Show the most exciting element, and the most time-consuming in preparation, was my contribution to the horticultural section. I exhibited two varieties of potatoes, onions, ‘two each of four varieties’ and peas. I arrived at 11pm the night before with my box of manicured, though somewhat diminutive, produce. Everyone was very helpful when I described myself as ‘novice’, with comments like ‘You have to start somewhere’. I enjoyed arranging my vegetables, on the slightly damp paper plates provided under makeshift electric lights in a moist marquee with grass-becoming-mud under foot, an olfactory delight. A very kind veteran saw me sorting out my potatoes and told me to place them with the eyes facing out, ‘That way they’re looking at you, you see?’ He was right, it made a difference. He also gave me sheets of kitchen roll to cover them to prevent the light from turning them green. He then said, ‘Wait till you get your first card and there’ll be no turning back.’

Experiencing the Show from the inside elucidated, for me, its significance in the life of a rural community. In this context the protocols, represented by the competition, created a reliable structure and served an obvious purpose. However, I suggest the importance of an event of this kind is in the regular, but temporary, opportunity to engage with others. Adhering to the rules of the competition made it possible for anyone to submit their vegetables, even a beginner, like me. The evening before the show the tent housing the horticultural section became a liminal and equal social space shared by only those who had spent the previous months nurturing their produce from seed to fruition. The meaning of the event changed, once the deadline for entries was reached, and the tent was then closed for judging the next morning.

The next day I was itching to visit my exhibits after the judging but I had to wait until I had someone to watch my market stall for half an hour. After dodging my way through meandering show visitors I found to my amazement that my peas had won third prize. I encountered the man who’d encouraged me the previous evening and he congratulated me saying, ‘you never know what you can do until you try.’ Several weeks later
received my prize money through the post in the form of a cheque for £1.00. The show
organisers had addressed it to ‘wildeyedeer’, the name of my market stall, a connection
they had clearly made themselves since I’d entered as Laura Wild

Another relational opportunity transpired when I invited a young man to work with me on the
allotment. He had been co-opted into a house group for students, which my partner and I
hosted fortnightly, from the college at which he was working. I discovered that he was repairing
dry-stonewalls as part of his manual duties and I approached him to see if he could advise me
how to repair mine. He worked with me at least one full day a week from mid-November until
March, through the chill of winter. He subsequently became one of the regular members of an
art group that I instigated, at the same college.

When we initially negotiated our working arrangement I asked what I could give my
wall-building friend in exchange for his labour. ‘A couple of coffees and a meal’, was his
reply, so some of our time together was spent sitting in the shed eating, drinking and
engaged in conversation. The wall in question formed the boundary between my
neighbours’ allotment and mine; it was these same neighbours whose building of a
compost bin, just behind my shaded seat, had annoyed me earlier in the summer. Their
reasoning was that if they disturbed the previous compost bin then the wall would fall
down more than it already had between us. I rang to tell them what we were doing as it
would require removing the old compost and digging out a trench on their side of the
wall. They turned up the next Saturday and helped for an hour, a token gesture, I
thought, because they never joined us again, but my wall-building friend jollied me out
of my grumblings about them and reminded me that I was the one who wanted the wall
intact.

Working with this young man was a fascinating experience as we had very different approaches to life.
He had a fundamental approach to faith, had been in the military and, as an extrovert, talked to
everybody who walked up the lane while he was working. Yet, despite our differences, we negotiated a
warm and trusting friendship

I recount how David Crouch, in his allotment research into performativity, asserts that in doing, as
opposed to purely thinking, a space, or ‘crack’, can emerge in which memories are re-activated
(Crouch, 2006, unpaginated). Crouch suggests that if these moments are experienced in
encounters with others there is the possibility for shared transformation. Crouch explains how
his conversations with allotment gardeners revealed their descriptions of ‘simple, uneventful
things they do’, in terms of the way they had felt when doing them, the transformative effect it
had upon them, more than any other kind of outcome (ibid.). He says the understanding they

29 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/potato/bakewell.html
30 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/pumpkin/wall.html
arrived at is ‘a knowledge that is imageric and sensate rather than ideational’ (ibid.). The work of rebuilding the walls, alongside the young man on my allotment, allowed space for our individual re-activation of memories, re-membering through doing, and for sharing these memories with each other and discovering our own, and each other’s, fragility. The wall we were repairing became a metaphor for our meeting together, rather than an outcome we were aiming to achieve. We had realised that the wall would probably never be complete and that our working relationship was temporary, but the physical act of firstly taking back the tumbled down sections, to strengthen the foundations, then rebuilding the wall together, encouraged us to imagine other opportunities in which to work alongside others, who may have been socially marginalised, in a process of inter-subjective becoming. Crouch says of his research intention that, in allowing what may seem mundane to be the context for discussion, it may be possible for individual subjects to embody the remarkable, whilst performing unremarkable practices (ibid.).

Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s Touch Sanitation (1984) is a project that spanned a number of years, from its conception in Manifesto (1969) to its public exhibition (Levin, 1984). The project itself consisted of a two-fold approach. Handshaking and Thanking Ritual began in the summer of 1979 and ended eleven months later when the task was complete and Ukeles had engaged with every one of the 8,500 sanitation workers in New York City. The manner of engagement was a face-to-face meeting, a shaking of hands and Ukeles’s addressing the words, ‘Thank you for keeping New York City alive’ (Gablik, 1991, 70), to each individual.

![Fig.9. Touch Sanitation 1977-84 Performance, Mierle Laderman Ukeles](image)

In order to execute this ambitious task Ukeles performed alongside the workers for shifts of between eight and sixteen hours a day thus gaining their respect even if they weren’t altogether sure about what she was doing (Colford, 1984). Alongside Handshaking Ritual, and during her days working with the Department, Ukeles observed and performed the movements and
gestures enacted by the workers, shadowing their actions (Morgan, 1998, 59). *Follow in Your Footsteps* (1979/80), was her way of publicly honouring otherwise overlooked individuality. Eleven years after the *Touch Sanitation* exhibition, in 1995, writing about her Artist Residency in New York City, Department of Sanitation, Ukeles explained her intentions through the project. She insisted that culture develops everywhere and that nothing should be regarded as less than anything else in importance (Ukeles, 1995). She was attempting to abolish the notion of some of life belonging behind the scenes (ibid.) and was thereby unsettling hierarchical structures by valuing maintenance work as equal to any other work such as that of an artist. I too am fascinated by situations that re-evaluate hierarchical distinctions whilst recognising that my work differs from Ukeles’s approach, which is strategic rather than rhizomatic. By this I mean that Ukeles set out with a goal that she achieved, whereas my approach is adventitious, meandering and reflexive. I deliberately let go of intention in order to see what happens. I have discovered that intention undermines the process of becoming. Ukeles set out to demonstrate her message by developing a major project from the repetition of simple gestures. I set out to respond to situations that emerge through my practice with results that could appear inconsequential and be easily overlooked but which examine the development of meaning in the process. It is for this reason that I am re-thinking what I previously thought to be negligible, past experiences alongside my current practice.

*I grew up in a house that was built as a miner’s cottage and storeroom of which, my mother used to say, the outside walls were three hundred years old. My childish imagination, exacerbated by the night sounds of mice scratching in the wall cavities, caused these spaces to grow into another, mysterious dimension. My favourite childhood stories, in particularly ‘Stig of the Dump’ (King, 1963), usually involved the discovery of worlds unknown by adults.*

My childhood imaginings are probably the reason why my art practice has incorporated elements of qualities inherent within social borderlands that encourage exploration into in-between spaces31 (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/headspace.html). For some time this was reflected in my choice of materials, which were very often other people’s leftovers32 (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/tech.html). When it became apparent to me that life itself was more relevant material for art than objects I began to wonder whether face-to-face encounters, listening to people’s stories and engaging with them in conversation, were not only friendship building but also my emerging practice. My interest in limen, emanating from my childhood experiences, is the reason I have always been drawn to people who live a marginal existence.

*A particularly significant friend of mine lived in a wood in Cornwall, his home was a bender; a traditional shelter made from hazel branches stuck into the ground, bent over,*

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31 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/headspace.html
32 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/tech.html
woven together and covered in tarpaulin. He cooked on an open fire and shared his food, by default, with rats and squirrels. He chose, whenever possible, to be naked and not to wash or cut his hair; on rare visits to town he would wear a kind of tunic that he described as a frock. His philosophy was to attempt to live with nothing, ‘possessions possess,’ he would say. He once burned a five-pound note in front of my children, an action that is still engraved on their memories twenty years later.

The action of burning money, destruction of one’s own personal possessions, is described by Marcel Mauss as potlatch (Mauss, 1993, 6). Potlatch, Mauss says, is a means to enhance one’s prestige in the opinion of another, going beyond giving, offering that which cannot be reciprocated. My friend in the woods embodied the Deleuzian principle of connecting with everything whilst forgetting everything (Deleuze, 2004, 107). '[Deleuze] encouraged us to leave behind all possessions, whilst also encouraging us to taste all things' (Williams, 2005, 5). Whenever I was in the vicinity of the woods I would endeavor to see my friend, so I visited him twice on a trip to the West Country in 2007.

I found his bender by following the smell, and then sight, of wood smoke. He was tending his fire when I arrived and heard me coming but, knowing he is short-sighted, I said ‘It’s Laura,’ to which he replied matter-of-factly, ‘I was just thinking of you.’ He was upset that I’d brought my mobile phone into the woods with me even though it was switched off; he said I wouldn’t like it if he came into my house with a gun even if it was unloaded. Fair enough, I thought, and on my second visit I left it behind and he was grateful. He had heard somewhere that mobile phone radiation disturbs the flight path of bees. Apparently, he told me, Einstein said that when the bees die, we die. As I left him on that occasion he very deliberately said ‘this is goodbye’. I thought this was because he was worried about becoming attached to people when his philosophy was to live with nothing. He showed me a postcard he’d received from his ex-partner who, after several years of living in a squat in Amsterdam, had succeeded in their shared dream of emigrating with their children to New Zealand. He told me to take the card and when I protested that he should keep it he said he would only burn it and that I could keep it as a memento since I was, so he said, part of the story33 (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/poppy/woodman.html).

The blunt honesty with which we were able to express our feelings to one another was due to our acceptance that despite very different approaches to life and society we accepted and respected that which was important to each other. It was at this point of acceptance, which Julia Kristeva describes as an abyss (Kristeva, 1987), that our lives overlapped and possibly the reason why we both had a sense that, despite the distance of time and space, we were somehow connected, hence his lack of surprise when I arrived in the woods after several months’ absence.

33 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/poppy/woodman.html
I first met my friend in the woods twenty years ago when he was living as a single man. On one of my first visits I offered him a back massage, I sometimes used this form of touch as a way of connecting with people. Only a few weeks later a young traveler woman arrived in the woods, she and he fell in love and over the next few years produced two baby girls. They then left to live in a commune in Spain for three years and had a third child, the relationship ended and he came back alone. He said, at the time, my massage had changed things for him and somehow opened him up to love, hence my part in the story. I am more cautious nowadays; perhaps this was the reason for his goodbye that just seven months later I had solemn cause to remember³⁴ (http://laurawild.blogspot.com/2008/04/disorientated-by-grief.html).

2.4 Becoming pacific

Yesterday was perfect digging weather, sunny but not hot. The ground had been frosted but had thawed so that weeds and roots almost seemed to help themselves in being lifted out of the earth. I had to pack up earlier than expected and I still had at least an hour’s digging left in me. Today, I had to spend the morning cooking at home for a dozen guests due to arrive this evening but I escaped as soon as was feasible on the 1:00 pm bus. I expected the same conditions as yesterday, as there seemed to be similar warmth from the sun, but arrived to find the ground still hard. It’s not impossible to dig but there is about an inch of frozen earth meaning that each fork full has to be broken open and each root eased out. This has put me in mind of how sometimes the most rewarding conversations that take place require a mutual process of coaxing and releasing of memory (Wild, 2007, 17/02/08).

Having come to understand the need for boundaries I found the form a boundary was to take had to be considered carefully since its presence would affect my neighbours as well as myself. I was attempting to clear away obstructions, whilst maintaining a mutually acceptable, softer, edge. I use the term soft as distinguishable from harsh or aggressive. The wire fence that I re-installed, between my neighbour and me, replaced the spiky, rambling teazles and allowed us sight of each other and the ability to converse freely whilst clearly defining my neighbour’s space from my own. We were then able to develop a day-to-day relationship.

I was working particularly hard, digging, on the day that my neighbour called me over and asked me to dig over his bean bed, ‘when you’ve a minute,’ he added. I felt lost for words because of the enormity of the task of digging before me on my own plot, but found myself agreeing and subsequently thinking that the opportunity for engagement was more valuable than having the ground ready for my own beans come spring.

³⁴ http://laurawild.blogspot.com/2008/04/disorientated-by-grief.html (see Appendix 1.4)
The new fence allowed my neighbour and me the ability to negotiate exchange. I was rewarded for my labours, a few days later, with a bottle of wine and more importantly a glimpse into his world\(^{35}\) (http://laurawild.blogspot.com/2007/10/neighbourly-interventions.html). What emerged when I began to engage with my neighbours was a mutual tenderness towards one-another, a compassionate concern for each other’s welfare, alongside often-humorous exchange. My allotment seemed to be becoming a place where different communities could overlap.

One day, some months later, having not only winter-dug my neighbour’s bean bed but also planted and provided support for the resultant beans, he called out to me, and having caught my attention, mimed to me the action of eating. I met him at the fence and he told me to come round at a particular time the next day for a bowl of his homemade soup. This, it turned out, became a regular invitation. Having already eaten his meal he would sit me at his kitchen table whilst he cleaned the cooker, washed up and regaled me with his family history. He grew up in a coalmining district and was the eldest in a family of twelve children, which was the reason he gave for being able to cook. I wasn’t encouraged to loiter on these occasions, as lunch for him was punctuation in his regular daily pursuit; in the morning he would take the bus to town, to place his bet, in order to spend the afternoon in front of his wide-screen TV watching the racing.

I have been building on my discovery that memory can sometimes be unearthed through day-to-day processes involving physically active work. I have described what occurs as *embodied becoming* that comes about through reflexively attending to process (see Chapter One, *Day-to-Day Process*). By examining encounters that occur between others and myself, when working together in an attitude of reflexive attention, I have found that action provides gaps for thinking whilst working, followed by pauses for uttering and being heard. I have noticed that these utterings are often released in conversation that is clumsy and stuttering.

The one-to-one meetings, working as artist’s model for my friend with whom I negotiated exchange rather than payment, were influential in my decision to invite people to converse with me in my shed. When working as model in artists’ studios I observed a pattern in the preliminary moments of welcoming, making tea or soup, and adjusting to becoming comfortable in each other’s company. I have come to regard a sometimes-clumsy beginning as a vital constituent in a process of becoming. Video recordings of the conversations I shared in my shed provide evidence of stumbling awkwardness, often involving laughter, whilst negotiating each other’s personal boundaries and assessing mutually common ground\(^{36}\) (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/spade/stutter.html). Gilles Deleuze suggests that one way not to conform to universal communication, that he sees to be a form of social control, is

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\(^{35}\) http://laurawild.blogspot.com/2007/10/neighbourly-interventions.html (see Appendix 1.5)

\(^{36}\) http://www.laurawild.co.uk/spade/stutter.html
with ‘vacuoles of noncommunication’ (Deleuze, 1995, 175). My working at the allotment re-building the walls with my friend was marked by our faltering, uneven conversation that I came to recognise as important precisely because of a lack of eloquence and which, I suggest, could be described as ‘vacuoles of noncommunication’ (ibid.).

*Much of the time working with my wall-building friend was spent in relative silence, sometimes we would work alongside each other, I would help moving stone, other times I would be digging some way off. Invariably, when we met for a break over a cup of coffee we shared in conversation about what we had each been mulling over during the working process. This felt like a supportive and yet non-intrusive way to proceed, in a peaceful atmosphere of natural growth. The work itself acted on the body as metaphor; the lifting of cold heavy stone, sparkling with frost, revealing the unexpected discovery of bluebells making their first attempts at new life.*

Fig.10. *Stones and bluebells, Laura Wild, 2008*

The process of working, that we shared, helped me to understand what Emmanuel Levinas was meaning when he said that simply being addressed is the most significant aspect of language (Levinas, 1988, 170). I have recognised that clearly articulated, reasoned speech may not always be the most meaningful method of communication, particularly initially, in face-to-face conversation. The words that passed between my wall building friend and me were not altogether crucial to what became meaningful. The point at which we connected was, as Levinas would say, the place of human frailty, as evidenced in our stumbling language. In meeting with another, face-to-face, Levinas places more emphasis on the physical meeting, than the language that passes between one and the other. ‘I have said that in my analysis of the face it is a demand; a demand, not a question. The face is a hand in search of recompense, an open hand. That is, it needs something. It is going to ask you for something’ (ibid, 169). Levinas describes the face-to-face meeting as involving ‘authority’, an authority not to be confused with ‘force’, but rather going hand in hand with extreme frailty (ibid. 169). He goes as far as to use the word ‘love’ to describe this moment, when one is regarded by the other as unique (ibid. 172). For Levinas the
moment of meeting, face-to-face, embodies more than can be understood linguistically. I have found the moment before words, when each regards the other, is an opportunity for becoming that, paradoxically, can be expectant as well as pacific. The relationship that I developed, in working together with my wall-building friend came to embody Levinas’s notion that ‘…there is something more important than my life, and that is the life of the other’ (ibid, 172).

What does Levinas mean when he puts the other before himself? Levinas’s position, which appears unusually altruistic, is, he would say, a question of ethics. ‘The Other puts me in question in such a way as I find myself responsible for the Other, for whom I can never do enough’ (Levinas, 2000, 62). Could Levinas’s ethical position be disabling in terms of intersubjective becoming in that his reticence to do harm to the other could make it impossible to take the risk of engagement? Derrida questions Levinas’s concept of alterity, proposing that in perceiving someone as other intrinsically negates them. ‘Can one make sense of an alterity that is not relative?’ (Derrida, 2000, 63). The argument is taken up by Dorothea Olkowski who, with reference to Iris Marion Young, cites the issue of relativity as a problem in terms of identity (Olkowski, 1999, 12). In articulating his specific use of the term alterity, Levinas explains that rather than generalising he is emphasising each individual’s eminence (Levinas, 1998, 205). Levinas acknowledges everyone as individually valuable rather than viewing subjects as constituents of a specific social order. My understanding is that Levinas is not ‘othering’ or ‘negating’ but, rather, approaching the other without attempting to assimilate them, by fusion, into himself. By avoiding mutuality and equality Levinas demonstrates his profound respect for the other’s individuality. He therefore prefers, when engaging with the other, to look for inequality, asymmetry and difference (Veling, date unknown, 3). Rather than ‘negating’ the other Levinas is proposing something very alternative; that relation can occur precisely because of an acknowledgement of difference since, he would say, it is in seeking equality that the other is diminished. Levinas absolves the other from reciprocation believing, like Kristeva (Kristeva, 1987, 254), that it is in the rupture of separation that relation can emerge (Veling, date unknown, 7).

As I described previously, my experience of working as life model for an artist who came to regard me as muse, resulted in my becoming increasingly uncomfortable with my own passivity in this setting. The relevance of citing this experience is in explaining my introduction of the adjective pacific instead of passive. In becoming pacific I make a distinct choice to engage in pacifism with an emphasis on finding peaceful solutions, particularly in relation to intersubjective power issues. In attempting to remain passive I discovered, both as artist’s model and in another situation as employee, that I laid myself open to exploitation. I persevered with an attitude of passivity for some time, in both situations, but found myself increasingly frustrated and de-skilled. Shifting the emphasis, from passive to pacific, has allowed me to approach situations peacefully, but actively, which has restored my self-esteem. I have discovered
therefore that being passive inhibits and closes down a process of inter-subjective becoming whereas becoming pacific opens up the way for new encounters.

My relationships with both my friend in the woods and also my wall-building friend were marked by the separation that Levinas suggests in regarding the other as unique. In becoming pacific, accepting each other's difference, we were able to meet in ways that would not have been possible were we attempting to assimilate, to find similarities, between us. I have previously demonstrated how seeking attachment inhibits, rather than encourages, inter-subjective becoming. I referred to Julia Kristeva who describes the moment of childbirth, after severance of the umbilical cord, as an abyss that opens up between mother and child determining, importantly, the child as other than its mother. This echoes Emmanuel Levinas's particular approach, in which he privileges 'other' before himself, which I suggest is not a passive response to difference but pacific, unconditional, face-to-face encounter.
Chapter Three: Ethical Interaction

3.1 Communitas

My friend’s death resulted in a remarkable overlapping of community. The owners of the farm shop, about a mile from his dwelling, rang to tell me that he had died. They knew from the local police who, they told me, were the principal donors to an alternative charity box that stood on their counter, of which my friend was the sole beneficiary. He would walk across the fields for a sack of potatoes if he hadn’t managed to find food elsewhere and as they said, they ‘would never see him go hungry’. He had friends of all ages who would visit the woods and sit a while with him; it was a woman who regularly used to chat with him when she walked her dogs in the woods, who found him dead.

Jane, who had provided space on her land for a temporary bender some years previously, agreed also to provide space for his grave. She and I took it upon us to arrange his burial. Together with a local GP, who had been his friend and not his doctor, and a young woman, who had previously lived in the woods, we wrote his obituary for the local paper. Jane collected his body from the hospital mortuary where the morticians placed, close to his heart, the postcard he had given to me on my last visit, from the mother of his children. We gathered, in the liminal spot, where we laid him to rest, at which the sea makes up 180 degrees of the horizon. Later, that night, around a fire in the woods where he had lived and died, trees were planted, whisky drunk and friendships rekindled. We all recognised that he had left us a remarkable gift, a sense of community, entirely due to him. We have gathered again since, in the woods, to light a fire and remember our friend and the extraordinary life he lived, of which we were all part. In this bringing together of loss and joy, there were moments of sorrow and love, before words, moments of becoming37 (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/carrotman/burial.html).

John Fox and Sue Gill, who were founders of Welfare State International (Welfare State International, 2006) in the 1960’s, now describe themselves as Dead Good Guides (Fox and Gill, 2010) and their work is mainly concerned with education and the performance of rites of passage. They describe their area of interest as being ‘between theatre and contemporary ceremonies for rites of passage’ (ibid.). They cite Gennep’s three-part structure of separation, giving way to transition, leading to re-incorporation (ibid.) as the model for rites of passage. Their interpretation of this model is ‘extinguish… pause to adjust… create the new’ (ibid.). I have observed how this same model operates within my practice, most often in small ways that could be easily overlooked, like planting seed, waiting, then tending the plants and harvesting the produce. The model describes metamorphosis, with echoes in day-to-day procedures, as well as mysticism, as Fox and Gill say, ‘such sequences can work in real space and time, within a self-contained invented world and quite mysteriously and cleverly, in both at once’ (ibid.).

37 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/carrotman/burial.html
would suggest that some spaces in day-to-day life have the facility to encourage metamorphosis such as the area of land, in Bakewell, referred to locally as the Showground all the year round; a limen for the annual gathering of community and the enacting of ritual where I exhibited my allotment grown produce (see Chapter Two, Risking Encounter).

Victor Turner describes *communitas* as a temporary sense of community exempt from the imposition of social structures (Turner, 1969, 140). He says that communitas is lost when it begins to form into more than a fragile unconstituted situation. Turner describes communitas as closely related to liminality and bearing no relation to status. He lists some characteristics that describe liminality, and contrasts them to characteristics of status systems. ‘Communitas/structure, silence/speech, transition/state, anonymity/systems of nomenclature, humility/just pride of position, foolishness/sagacity’ (ibid, 106). Turner sees communitas as an initial, liminal stage in the development of community that would pose an impossible condition for society as a whole. He examines the life of the 12th century Francis of Assisi as a means to explore his notion of ‘communitas’ (ibid, 141). I suggest Francis and my friend in the woods were examples of two very different men, in contrasting contexts and histories, closer than most to achieving communitas through their day-to-day lives and relationships. Both men challenged accepted notions of success, which was for them directly related to how well they managed to live in poverty. They were both ultimately convinced that possessions possess a person and therefore were most likely to experience their goal if they relinquished everything except their naked bodies and souls. I wonder whether Francis would have welcomed his posthumous Canonisation or been happy that the Order bearing his name carries the marks of social structure that were so abhorrent to him. Unlike Francis, my friend was not regarded as a saint, mostly people were wary of his difference though some, like me, had respect for his lifestyle choices.

‘Prophets and artists tend to be liminal and marginal people, “edge[wo]men,” who strive with a passionate sincerity to rid themselves of the clichés associated with status incumbency and role-playing and to enter into vital relations with other [wo]men in fact or imagination. In their productions we may catch glimpses of that unused evolutionary potential in [hu]mankind which has not yet been externalised and fixed in structure.’ (Turner, 1969, 128)

When I met Owen Adams, in the summer of 2008, he was an allotment tenant in Sheffield engaged in guerrilla gardening, in the city, a practice of cultivating and planting small patches of ground that had fallen into neglect. The day Owen came to talk with me in my shed was the week after he had installed his Fine Art Degree Show at Sheffield Hallam University. Owen asked to visit me at my allotment having heard about the story-making event that took place there a year before with other students from the same University. Since his undergraduate project involved a collaborative compost-making process he wanted to investigate how I was working with allotment processes as Fine Art research. Our conversation included a discussion about our position as artists in relation to society. Owen described how he sees the role of artists as standing apart from society, or commitment to a particular ideology, in order to be able
to comment from a distance although, paradoxically, inexperienced in the process about which they are commenting. He described a friend who, committed to educating people about organic growing methods, opens his allotment two days a week for people to come and talk with him. Owen’s friend had an exhibition in a Sheffield Art Gallery about the cost of grain around the world which Owen suggests could have been described as art but for the fact that his friend did not regard himself as an artist and has little patience with some artists, whose methods he considers parasitic. Owen said of his friend that, ‘he is pragmatically learning by doing’. In considering my practice, next to Owen’s comments, I am in agreement that it is an artist’s prerogative to stand apart. However, my practice balances subjective embodied becoming, which could be understood as ‘learning by doing’, and inter-subjective becoming with others who would very often not describe themselves as artists. Like Owen’s friend, I attempt to avoid behaving parasitically and, increasingly, find my practice involves the constant renegotiation of boundaries both socially and in terms of art. Following our conversation Owen suggested I take part in a day of live art events at Meersbrook Allotments in Sheffield.

* A group of about a dozen of us braved the rain and were guided round the maze of pathways into a remarkable variation of hedged plots containing ramshackle sheds and glasshouses constructed from reclaimed materials. Some were showing signs of vandalism but the general sense was of cornucopian care. 

The event was headed up by Anne-Marie Culhane (Growsheffield, 2010) who, I later serendipitously discovered, was to be relocating to Cornwall the following month of August, 2008, around the same time as we were. I was subsequently able, therefore, to deliver a box containing my contribution for *Allotment Soup* to Anne-Marie’s new home in Cornwall with instructions for its installation and participation. *Allotment Soup* was an experience for me of letting go since geographical distance meant that it was not practical for me to be present on the day. Story making in this context utilised objects loaned by allotment tenants at Meersbrook and the work was installed and overseen by the event organisers and the tenants of the plot where it was sited.

The most important factor in terms of my research was the way that meetings and events unfolded rather than being strategically organised. Owen heard of my research from fellow students and I heard from Owen about ‘Allotment Soup’. This led to my meeting with Anne-Marie who subsequently came to be living close to me, which has resulted in an on-going dialogue. We were enabled, as Turner suggests, ‘to enter into vital relations with other [wo]men in fact or imagination’ (Turner, 1969, 128), by our art processes that were open-ended and unrestrained by unnecessary structure.

38 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/carrotman/oa.html (movie on left)
39 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/carrotman/allotment_soup.html
Anne-Marie Culhane, curator of ‘Allotment Soup’ invited me to take part in a project of her own called ‘Ear To The Ground’ (Culhane, 2010) from which she asked for documentation of the experience. I found it strangely difficult to decide where to listen to the ground and settled upon my friend’s grave. Jane, in whose field we had buried him, accompanied me in this process (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/carrotman/ear.html).

Another opportunity for inter-subjective becoming came about when I was invited to be on the Sarum Conference leadership team in September 2009 for a conference taking place, in Salisbury, in March 2010. These are a group of people who describe themselves as ‘impaired pilgrims’, bringing together their spirituality and disability. I was invited because, for their next conference, they were planning to explore creativity. After much careful thought we decided the best course of action would be to put together people who have severe physical disability with artist volunteers, who would act as amanuenses. For example, an able-bodied artist would paint, draw, cut or paste according to the directions of a conference delegate who was physically unable to engage with the materials. I introduced this day of exploration by describing my experiences of working collaboratively with other artists. I shared how liberating I find the process of decision making when it occurs in a space between people rather than independently of others’ input. I explained how not only does it dispel the angst-ridden loneliness that was my experience of being a painter, but it also means that, in moments of serendipity, the wonder is shared. I decided my role was to provide materials, introduce the working methods and oversee the activities. The results were profoundly moving for both parties in each of these collaborative partnerships; what developed was an exchange of passivity and activity. As the only person present who was able-bodied and not a designated carer, I realised, in retrospect that I had become the most passive person present, the only person not engaging with the process of making art objects. The method we adopted demonstrates the difference between my art practice and art therapy. Unlike a therapist I was not looking for a particular outcome, such as improved mobility or peace of mind. I was simply providing the materials in order to develop, and maintain, for the duration of the weekend conference, an environment of communitas (Turner, 1969, 140) for letting loose subjective and inter-subjective imagination.

In the mid 1990’s during one of our family visits to the Taize Community in France (Taize, 2010), I approached one of the Brothers there, an artist, for a conversation about being a person on a journey of faith as well as an artist. I was struggling with how to reconcile my work with a need to be socially useful. The Brother I spoke with told me about his work, which was carved wooden bowls. He told me that he chose to work with burr wood, which comes from the part of a tree that has healed itself after being wounded. He described how this wood is particularly strong and its imperfections show as intricate patterning on the carved surface. This description was a response in a form familiar to him, a parable, to the dilemma I had shared.
Visiting the Taize Community has been crucial to the development of my day-to-day life and art practice. As a visitor everyone becomes of equal status, during his or her visit, by being required to take part in the day-to-day routine. According to Victor Turner, a lack of status is a mark of liminality and is therefore conducive to communitas (Turner, 1969, 106). My experience of Taize was of a place in which I experienced temporary communitas with others whilst maintaining my own identity, or difference, a state that I will describe as inter-subjective becoming and which I look for in my day-to-day life, as art.

Fig.11. Meal at Taize, Photo by Steve Wild, 2005

3.2 Conformity or Nonconformity?

A friend who works in a centre for healing came to talk with me in my shed. Our conversation, inspired by the shed and the allotment, revolved around ways of living simply, yet more fully. My friend had belonged to a Religious Community for about twenty years where she had experienced a rigorous form of living within a system structured around simplicity, discipline and poverty. Having freed herself of her previous life, realising it was no longer her vocation, she now earns her living as an art therapist. She commented, in response to being in my shed, that the more sophisticated people’s dwellings become, the greater the urge for a place to retreat to, such as a garden shed or summerhouse. She also has friends who live on the margins of society in benders and caravans and was therefore interested to hear about my friend in the woods’ lifestyle, his attempting to live with as little as possible\(^41\) (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/spade/ew.html). She was interested to hear me outline my research and, as an allotment tenant, she too identified with engaging in natural cycles through ordinary processes such as gardening.

\(^{41}\)http://www.laurawild.co.uk/spade/ew.html
I have previously referred to Allan Kaprow (see Chapter Two, Negotiating Boundaries), who advocates a move away from ‘the traditions’, that he believes inhibits freedom of expression and instead suggests a mixing up of disciplines or ‘admixtures’ (Kaprow, 1993, 105). He describes how, historically, inter-disciplinarity has been seen as contaminating the purity of the individual disciplines within art, such as painting or poetry. He recommends deliberate contamination, as a means of escape from tradition, which he describes as ‘a rite of passage’ (ibid.). Kaprow suggests that by adhering to the ‘purity’ of distinctly separate disciplines we, as artists, buy into a hierarchically maintained system upheld by the production of art objects. He describes our resistance to this given system as ‘intermedial,’ a term he coined to describe a simultaneous mixing up of roles that results in process rather than a work of art. (ibid, 105). In his essay The Meaning of Life (ibid, 229), Kaprow tells a story about two men who were partners. One decides to go on a trip and discover the meaning of life, the other stays and continues to run the business. Harry, the adventurer, returns some time later looking bruised and battered but exultant at having discovered the meaning of life to be the hole in the middle of a bagel. Disillusioned of this fact by Mike, his ex-partner, he is undaunted and sets off again in pursuit of his quest. Kaprow expounds this story with an extensive analysis, involving hypothetical reasoning, as to which of the men is right. However, it becomes evident that the story is in fact an illustration of what Kaprow describes as ‘lifelike art’ as opposed to ‘artlike art’. ‘Artlike artists’ are looking for the meaning of art whereas ‘lifelike artists’ he says are looking for meaning in life. ‘The greatest part of the story is what we choose to add to it. And that’s the story of lifelike art’ (ibid, 232).

Kaprow’s reasoning highlights art as problematic, in relation to life. Artists often deliberately act outside of art institutions in order to choose life rather than art as their material and reference point, and commentators for half a century have questioned whether the work they do can be described as art? My intention is not to discuss this question but rather to ask why there is a need for artists to be forever renegotiating institutional frameworks and what we, as artists, are bringing to art, and society, in doing so? Joseph Beuys’s term, ‘social sculpture’ (Beuys, 2008), began to mess up the definition between art and life and, since Beuys, many artists have explored this messy territory, some of whom I have been commenting on throughout the thesis. Artists and commentators have been making sense of new approaches in framing them politically and socially, such as Allan Kaprow, (Kaprow, 1993), Lucy Lippard (Lippard, 1973, 1984, 1997), Suzanne Lacy (Lacy, 1995, 2007), Suzi Gablik (Gablik, 1991, 1995, 2002), Linda Frye Burnham and Steven Durland (Frye Burnham & Durland, 1998), Nina Felshin (Felshin, 1995) Linda Weintraub (Weintraub, 1996), and more recently; Nicolas Bourriaud (Bourriaud, 2000, 2002), Miwon Kwon (Kwon, 2004), Grant Kester (Kester, 2004), Claire Doherty (Doherty, 2004), Claire Bishop (Bishop, 2004, 2006), Chantal Mouffe (Mouffe, 2008), Gregory Sholette (Sholette, 2003, 2010), Stephen Wright (Wright, 2007, 2008, 2010) and Kim Charnley (Charnley, 2011).
During our conversation in my allotment shed, Owen Adams commented that some artists methods could be described as parasitic (see Communitas), observing and taking information from life back into art thereby making of it something new, an artwork. Kaprow’s ‘lifelike’ artist however, chooses to function within life, art then occurs in life where it is sometimes overlooked, as art. I would suggest that being overlooked does not in any way diminish the work, as art, in the same way as being overlooked as an individual does not in any way diminish each subject’s individuality, or as Levinas might have said, their individual eminence. Kaprow says lifelike art is what artists add to meanings they find, in life, as opposed art (Kaprow, 1993, 232). Stephen Wright asks ‘What happens when artists use their reflexive competence to inform symbolic activities and configurations without laying claim to them as art?’ (Wright, 2008) He asserts that art is not a discipline but is extra-disciplinary, in operating beyond disciplinary boundaries, art as action rather than object. Wright suggests that art can make its appearance as its specific means, rather than its specific ends. In other words, what can be perceived are the tools rather than artworks (ibid.). He introduces the term ‘usership’, to encourage the collaborative augmentation of art beyond the mainstream artworld (Wright, 2007). Wright emphasises how art cannot be contained by, and therefore does not only conform to, a singular world of art but can be discovered in what he terms ‘plausible artworlds’ (Wright, 2010). In using the term nonconformity I refer both to how my practice functions, as Kaprow would say, intermedially as lifelike art (Kaprow, 1993, 105), and ‘extra-disciplinarily’, as Wright would say, beyond the singular mainstream artworld (Wright, 2010). I also use the term nonconformist to describe people and situations with whom, and in which, I most often engage.

For almost three years I attended a Quaker Meeting. I had been interested in Quaker attitudes to peace and justice and the Meeting House was only a few minutes walk from my home at that time. I was invited to a series of house groups where Quaker principles were imparted to those of us who were newcomers. I was particularly impressed, at that time, by the method of decision-making that involved waiting upon 'the sense of the meeting' in order to reach consensus. I had been used to democratic decision-making in the Methodist Church. However, I discovered in practice that, similarly to any other social system, there were tensions between individual personalities and consensus was sometimes never reached resulting in no decision being made and development being limited (Religious Society of Friends, 2005).

Chantal Mouffe contends that it is necessary to recognise the antagonistic, as well as contingent, nature of social order and as such, she suggests, art can have agency in contesting Capitalist domination (Mouffe, 2008). Mouffe believes pluralism, with its inherent contradictions, is presented to society, by neo-liberal politicians, as ‘an harmonious ensemble’ (Ibid, 8), which implies the need for consensus. Mouffe urges that consensus, based on reason, obscures political understanding whereas ‘antagonism reveals the very limit of any rational consensus’ (ibid. 12). Mouffe therefore suggests that in working with contradiction art has a crucial role to
play. I suggest that bringing to light the overlooked can reveal contradiction inherent to a social order based on consensus and is therefore antagonistic practice.

_I remembered one day that it was a friend’s birthday and searched through diaries until I found a phone number for the flat at which I had visited him two years previously. A young woman answered the phone and said that he had used to live there but that she thought he had died. This was sad news but not altogether surprising, as I knew he had been suffering with poor health. I was surprised, however, that no one had told me when he died. I eventually had it confirmed having pursued a circuitous route._

_Tragedically, having belonged to a community when street-homeless, he had become almost invisible once housed. The life of this man, who would often share his last food or money others more vulnerable than himself, serves as an example of the inhumanity of ‘othering’. Having been housed he would have become a positive government statistic, as one less homeless person, but in terms of informal support networks he was then isolated. Visits from his former friends, still living on the streets, made him unpopular with his neighbours and put his tenancy in jeopardy and mobility issues made it difficult for him to make new friends._

Sociologist, John Law is concerned about research methods being responsible for othering any possibility of mess and suggests it is important to be prepared to embrace confusion in order to allow for some of the mess to be ‘rehabilitated’ rather than marginalised (Law, 2008). In applying John Law’s suggestions to my friend’s story, the issue in question concerns a need for embracing the confusion of homelessness rather than allowing the results to be pushed out of sight, and therefore out of mind and allowing the mess of the situation, a social issue not just a personal problem, to remain unaddressed.

As I suggested earlier, I see Joseph Beuys’s role, in the history of 20th Century Art, as the protagonist of mess. Beuys delighted in bringing together otherwise disparate disciplines, materials and social situations. An important element of his work involved engaging in messy situations such as being locked in a room alone with a wolf, _I like America and America Likes Me_ (1974). Much of my art practice has involved exploring inter-subjective becoming in relationship with individuals, particularly nomads who exist on the edges of society sometimes by choice, other times circumstantially. My experience has shown me that nomads often proffer nonconformist lifestyles that can uncover messy situations in what may appear to be tidy, state systems.

_However, my first visit to Glastonbury Festival was in the mid 1990’s (Glastonbury Festival, 2010). I went with my youngest daughter, then aged eighteen months, and two female friends. I had been advised by some of my nomadic friends to avoid staying in the regular camping areas and to make for the Green Field. Since we were all three affiliated to churches, we decided to check out the Churches Field. We were welcomed, but as potential evangelists, which confirmed to us that we should explore my nomadic friends’ advice. The Green Field seemed to be an area for every experience of New Age spirituality_
and healing imaginable. We discovered a corner, demarcated by string and a sign saying ‘women only’. Since we all fitted this description we pitched our tents there. We were greeted and invited to attend a ‘beating the bounds’ ceremony. The next day I had a visit from a man I had met on site and since we had camped by the string that separated us women from the rest of the festival, he and I conversed across it. However, we were interrupted by two of the women in our area that I had unintentionally offended by allowing a man to approach.

My experience of Glastonbury Festival, that year, showed me that conformity is not only associated with mainstream society but with ideologies of every description. I discovered that being on the edge is the experience of not conforming to any group professing an ideological perspective. However much I desired a sense of inclusion I recoiled at being required to relinquish free will. Earlier in the chapter (see Communitas) I cited Victor Turner who describes artists as ‘edge[wo]men’ (Turner, 1969, 128). My interest in edges, where one boundary meets the next, was my motivation for inviting Heath Bunting to talk with me in my shed that was, by then, located in my garden in Cornwall42 (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/hb.html). Heath describes himself as a public artist since his work operates in the public domain. His work challenges accepted political systems and designated structures. Heath explained to me his intention to enable subjects an informed position in society by making systems of regulations more broadly visible, and therefore more accessible, through an informed understanding of the ways they operate. (Kurator and LX 2.0, 2009). The testing of boundaries is therefore key to his practice particularly in his project Borderxing that was funded by TATE Modern (Bunting, 2002), in which, in order to test the need for a passport within the European Union Heath travelled without one and instead made green border crossings or crossed at the ordinary borders but in an unusual manner.

Fig.12. Borderxing, Heath Bunting, 2002

42 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/hb.html
Heath pointed out that at the same time as he was receiving TATE funding for this project he was also on police bail and forbidden to enter the USA because of suspected terrorist activity due to an anti-GM campaign he had instigated (irational.org, 2005). This paradoxical situation, he said, demonstrated how as an artist one has ‘reach’. The notion of reach was, he told me, his initial motivation for becoming an artist after observing possibilities through the working practices of some friends who were artist activists. Heath told me that he decided to pursue a lifestyle that allowed him to be empowered by living with very little, rather than being controlled by a desire for financial gain.

Fig.13. Cave cleaning work, St. Vincents Spring, Avon Gorge, Bristol, Heath Bunting, 2010.

I first came across Heath Bunting’s work in 2002 whilst researching other artists’ use of corridors and tunnels. I was exploring the notion of liminal space and constructing installations that incorporated elements intended to provoke sub-sensory feelings. I had previously experimented with a process of bricolage involving video, performance and projection as a way of sketching ideas. I found sketching in this way allowed memories to emerge. At that time, Bunting was exploring the tunnels running under his hometown of Bristol (Bunting & Duo, 2002) and it was an open invitation to join him in this process that caused his project to remain in my mind. Bunting was using the Internet, not just as a means for communicating information but more importantly, as a way to encourage interaction in the form of actual, rather than virtual, adventure. Since meeting with Heath, from time to time, I receive email invitations to join in various events such as cooking in a cave in winter or swimming under Clifton Suspension Bridge at neap tide. I have not, as yet, joined in any of these activities but I consider my life to be enhanced and challenged by the possibility. Bunting’s work is nonconformist, viewed with suspicion by police and custom controls, he is

43 [http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/infrasense.html](http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/infrasense.html)
44 [http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/rend.html](http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/rend.html)
frequently apprehended and questioned, because of his investigations, which make visible and therefore challenge established structures that control our day-to-day lives. bell hooks makes the connection for me between my practice and Heath’s, more obviously, transgressive actions saying ‘…there are so many barriers blocking the paths that would lead us to any space of fulfilment that it is impossible to go forward if one lacks the will to transgress’ (hooks, 1995, 133). I would suggest that hooks is describing a process of becoming and that transgression is therefore a necessary characteristic of this process. My practice of meeting with people face-to-face is not so overtly transgressive as Heath Bunting’s and yet I question the meaning of inter-subjectivity by encouraging encounter without identifying a particular purpose or aim. I discovered, through our conversation, that Heath explores boundaries very differently to me, by transgressing them and overcoming them, sometimes putting himself in physical danger in the process. I explained to him how I, on the other hand, explore the space between one boundary and another, the point at which an overlapping occurs. Heath commented, ‘that sounds like a very abstract obsession’, which caused me to examine my position more closely. I am not concerned with gaining entry or standing my ground but, rather, ‘coming to exist differently’ (Lomax, 2005, 6), inter-subjectively, together with others; an engagement with others that is fragile, undetermined and, as such, defies definition. The significance of such engagement is sensed in the moment but only recognised in retrospect.

‘I do not produce meaning, or knowledge, or thought, on my own. I do not produce my life alone. It is always with. So often, however, this with becomes forgotten. Indeed, so often, far too often, this with becomes annihilated as the power of hatred pits us against the world. Yet it is with that furthers my becoming.’ (Lomax, 2005, 6)

There were several strands to our conversation. I see some similarities between Heath’s motives and mine, we both have a disregard for wealth and we both recognise a personal desire for living day-to-day life from a spiritual perspective. Heath, who describes himself as a Buddhist, works in a way that is politically radical, whereas my art practice acts on the world in a subliminally political way. I found being in Heath’s company inspiring, our acceptance of each other’s difference, our ethical interaction in Levinasian terms (see Chapter Two, Becoming Pacific), allowed space for inter-subjective becoming. I experienced edginess, which I remember feeling when visiting nomads on their temporary sites, a sense of being alert and challenged towards transgressive ways of thinking (hooks, 1995, 133).

3.3 Tension and Interaction

My research focuses on small-scale, social interaction which, described in sociological terms as Interactionism, perceives individuals as acting consciously rather than simply responding to social stimulation (Livesey, 2010). Every individual is understood to have a grasp of human behaviour based upon his or her unique life experience. Inter-subjective interaction reveals discrepancies in understanding leading to awareness of difference. I have observed, through
inter-subjective interaction, that recognition of difference can develop into tension when that which has been overlooked is acknowledged. My particular interest is in attending to, rather than othering, tension; allowing for moments of ethical inter-subjective becoming. I feel my way from one micro interaction to the next alert to, and welcoming of, incoherency and interruption. I identify territory, that is new to me, where tentative explorations into the domain of others, such as with my friend in the woods, require a continual negotiation of personal boundaries in order to be respectful and non-invasive.

Iris Marion Young suggests that, in attempting to bring together disparate communities, a process of aggregation involves the denial of difference and therefore is harmful to subjective and communal identity. She says that in viewing the notion of identity, any dominantly powerful group will regard as other anyone not actively conforming to the privileged group’s prevailing expectations. Young argues therefore that the notion of an ideal community is inhibiting and alienating. She advocates the overlapping of social groupings, in which difference can be accepted, whilst not compromising individual identity (Young, 1990). Young’s argument has helped me clarify how my process of inter-subjective interaction differs from that of mainstream society. ‘Community Cohesion’ is a term currently used by the British government, as a target to ‘enable us, as citizens, to live together instead of side by side’ (iCoCo, 2010). Miwon Kwon, writing in the context of Community Art, cites Young, in saying that community, when viewed as an ideal, is unworkable since it seeks unity, thereby othering difference (Kwon, 2004, 140). I suggest that ‘Community Cohesion’ is not only unrealistic as a target but could be said to be unethical when imposed, as a requirement, by people with power. My understanding through practice is that interaction, defined as open-ended and reciprocal (Mac OSX Dictionary, 2011), is a more realistic, ethical methodology for working together with difference and as such could be a means to ‘overlapping community’ (Young, 1990).

Dorothea Olkowski proposes that society may need guiding in new ways of creative thinking (Olkowski, 1999, 15) that resist the assimilation of difference and instead engage in processes that encourage heterogeneity. She introduces a Deleuzian notion in describing Young’s overlapping as a ‘stuttering’ process of ‘perpetual disequilibrium’ (ibid. 14). I have observed stuttering, both linguistically and physically, as a characteristic manifest in my practice of face-to-face interaction. I have found initial meetings can generate momentary tension that is sometimes evidenced in physical clumsiness and stuttering speech, the Levinasian moment when each regards the other face-to-face. Emmanuel Levinas’s concern for ethics in relation to others means that he deliberately avoids seeking equality, inclusivity and mutuality since he believes that in seeking these qualities we attempt to assimilate others into ourselves (Veling, date unknown), (see Chapter Two, Becoming Pacific). Levinas always places other before himself, in doing so he allows a gap of separation in which, untainted by a desire for unity, the other is allowed freedom to be themselves and the possibility of unconditional relationship can then occur (ibid.). My art practice emerges from such moments and it is this territory in which, I
suggest, it is the prerogative of artists to be guides, as Olkowski describes, in a stuttering process of becoming (Olkowski, 1999, 14).

Whilst concurring with Young’s theory of the notion of an ideal community to be inhibiting and alienating I am conscious that Young is writing from an urban standpoint (Young, 1990, 317). She suggests city life has offered a freedom for the expression of ‘otherness’ that smaller communities inhibit in ‘the closeness of the face-to-face community’ (ibid.). Since my work and life experience has existed mostly within small town or village situations, my viewpoint differs in this aspect of Young’s theory. My practice functions in an environment where face-to-face closeness is inevitable and, as such, I have chosen to work with tension, which occurs within that closeness. I suggest that disregarding rural communities results in the othering of a wealth of intuitive knowledge. I have discovered how I can absorb knowledge by attending to natural rhythms, such as those embodied in my interactions with wildlife and climate, out of which my particular understanding of overlapping community has emerged most significantly in attending to ‘the closeness of the face-to-face community’.

There is a massive cherry tree just outside my window, which provides an ever-changing display from blossom to berry accompanied by the provision of perch and food for a vociferous goldfinch and hungry blackbirds. I woke one morning to witness a pair of ring-necked doves nest-building close to my window, one fetching material, the other weaving the nest. A few days later the female, I assume, was sitting on her eggs. Within a week of the happy couple’s arrival in the tree I witnessed their siege and ultimate overthrow by greedy magpies determined to indulge their lust for egg.

An impromptu conversation in September 2009, with an artist employed by a nearby University, resulted in my part-time employment in a pioneering project inspired by my description of intersubjective becoming through the process of gardening. We worked in what became a community garden project, together with children who were living in care.

In the community garden we are currently building a straw-bale classroom. I have been considering how to occupy the children if the building process is rained off. Since we are devising planting plans for our vegetable plots the first thought I had was to involve the children in their acting out rotation and companion planting in the form of a game. The thought of kids becoming vegetables initially amused me, then I realised a deeper meaning in the context of those whose lives are rotating both geographically as well as in terms of family. The concept of companion planting then serves as a positive model for the overlapping of their communities.

Despite its serendipitous beginnings the community garden project became challenging to my preference for a process of becoming. Measures for ensuring health and safety were huge, but
necessary. I had imagined that as ‘lead artist’ and not ‘project manager’ I would be spared these concerns, whereas in fact what emerged was that I was powerless to implement some measures that I felt were necessary for the safety of the children and for us as leaders. The institutional structure had difficulty accommodating my role that had emerged, rather than being prescribed, and added to this there were difficulties within the team around authorship and control. What had been envisioned as a space for becoming was complicated with strategic thinking and the need for meeting targets such as encouraging the children towards further education. I discovered the most significant material I was working with was tension and resolved to attempt to address this tension with passivity. I hoped my passivity in the face of conflict would deflect the focus of power. I was not altogether successful in this aim allowing myself, on a couple of occasions, to jostle for recognition in the event of being disregarded. I began to wonder if a project such as this, working within a hierarchical structure, required an agreed and shared ideology?\(^{45}\) (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/pumpkin/garden.html).

I attempted to practice a subversive approach to maintaining subjective identity within a corporate environment, advocated by Michel DeCerteau. ‘Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of an antidiscipline’ (DeCerteau, 1984, xv). In the context of the community garden this for me meant accepting that I was working within a conformist structure but recognising that it could be the means to something remarkable if I accepted it as an opportunity to engage in my own areas of interest, regardless of pressure from above. The structure, in theory, seemed to allow for a safe enough place in which to research, through face-to-face encounter, ‘working on a one-to-one basis with young people’, which was part of my job description. However, I eventually found the level of tension overwhelmingly stressful and time-consuming.

In examining my experience of working as a University employee at the community garden, I am reminded of Barbara Glasson’s use of metaphor in describing her role as ‘scarecrow ministry’ whereby she sees her responsibility, within the community she managed in Liverpool, as fending off the big birds in order to allow the more vulnerable ones space to be nourished safely. We had agreed at the outset of the community garden that it would be a non-competitive project, at which point I had understood the project to be collaborative. The Institution that seemed unable to comprehend, or account for, a project based on open-ended becoming contradicted these aims. The project manager inevitably became torn between allowing for the children we were working with to develop in tune with the rhythms of a garden, and the building infrastructure. Needless to say the Institutional requirements became the highest priority and I decided to resign, resolving to find less controlled and contrived environments in which to work in future. I have, however, continued to feel uneasy that the experience was so stressful and uncomfortable, unlike my previous experiences of employment. During a conversation with a friend about art, some months later, in which I referred to commodified objects, my friend commented

\(^{45}\) http://www.laurawild.co.uk/pumpkin/garden.html
that it is we, as subjects, who are commodified. This caused me to recognise that as an employee of the University and accountable to the Project Manager I became a commodity from which the intention was to extract maximum money's worth. I felt ill at ease because of my tendency to over-responsibility in the work place, which meant that in this situation I felt vulnerable to exploitation. I later understood that attempting to address tension with passivity had resulted in self-exploitation. This experience of employment was instrumental in my decision to use the term pacific instead of passive (see Chapter Two, Becoming Pacific), as a working method thereafter. I have also reconsidered my attitude to work as a result of this experience and what has emerged as significant is that although my practice involves ordinary process that could be described as labour, the way I approach it is irregular. When I am working in a garden, for instance, I undertake tasks that I feel inspired to do at the time, in response to the garden itself, such as cutting back a bush to enable walking along the path. As a result I never become bored or disenchanted and if the work begins to feel like a chore I move on to something else. I rarely finish tasks that I begin and so my process could be described as an antidiscipline. In the light of this new understanding I can see why my process did not easily transfer to, but instead resisted and contradicted, the hierarchical structure of the garden project in which I was employed.

3.4 Artist, citizen or activist?

Ten years ago I had a discussion with Dieter, an artist friend in Berlin (Balzer, 2010), about Tides Must Turn; a body of work in which I was aiming to challenge attitudes and thereby minimise the cultural gap between people who live in houses and others who are homeless and living on the street (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/poppy/tides.html). Dieter contested that my work said more about me than the situation I was trying to highlight. He suggested I should have made a photographic document of those who are homeless. A debate about ethics ensued, Dieter was clear that in art anything is permissible, whereas my concern was in not being exploitative. This conversation has been pivotal in how I've subsequently considered my work. A later project, nonconformist (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/poppy/nonconformist.html), (Newlyn Gallery, 2003), was my attempt, having reflected on Dieter's advice, at an ethical means to developing dialogue around what I now describe as the ‘othering’ of difference. I invited people I knew well, whose lifestyles resisted a conformist social order, to record a day in their life with a disposable camera and notepad. Five, of the fifteen people I invited, agreed to take part, the others used the notepads and cameras for their own purposes. I asked those who engaged in the project to edit the results, if they wished, and I then made the images and text into an interactive CDRom. This became a means to dialogue, in various situations, about the advantages and disadvantages of a nonconformist lifestyle. The result was quite ordinary in many ways and surprising in others but altogether more descriptive, of the situation I was attempting to highlight, than my Tides Must Turn work. In reflecting on this

46 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/poppy/tides.html
47 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/poppy/nonconformist.html
shift that took place within my work, from maker to mediator, I can see that my focus has shifted again. I have reconsidered the meaning of my role in nonconformist, my interest now being in face-to-face encounter and inter-subjective becoming. Following nonconformist, I decided to visit the participants by way of debriefing. The visits, which I did not, at the time, regard as part of the project, have emerged subsequently as the most significant element in terms of inter-subjective becoming. With one of the participants it provided the opportunity for our reunion, after a gap of several years, and the unfolding of another collaborative project.

In 1989, when my family and I first moved to St.Ives, I set up a pottery studio in our home with the intention of working in isolation. What actually happened was that I spent my days befriending the busking and rough sleeping community of the town and inviting them home for meals and use of the bathroom. My studio evolved into a community space where people met and talked and sometimes made things out of clay. One of these people spent his days writing and drawing in a series of notebooks. I was intrigued by his activity and we became friends for the period of four months before his family discovered his whereabouts and he returned to London. He had arrived in St.Ives following a music festival in the South West and squatted beach huts in the summer months, then derelict properties as winter set in… I took with me to our reunion, the series of sketchbooks that he had left with me in St.Ives when he returned to London twelve years before. He was delighted and moved to receive these and explained their powerful significance. Unbeknown to me he had suffered a long-term history of schizophrenia and his months in St.Ives, when we had been friends, had been the only period in his illness spent without medication. His notebooks were, therefore, an embodiment of this period of freedom. Following our meeting we continued to work together in another art project; a series of drypoint etchings, his chosen medium, in which we mailed etching plates backwards and forwards to each other, re-working the images, adding to each other’s work, to create collaborative etchings. During those few months in St.Ives, we had created a liminal space, through our day-to-day friendship, which he described in his own words for nonconformist project. ‘Going insane was my way of getting in touch with my feelings. Now I’m on pills I’m not sure whether the truth of my existence is really present in my mind. I would not choose non-conformity in some ways but progress is about non-conformity. Once again, thank you for thinking of me, and please use this letter in your exhibition – I think it says something important about me.’ In retrospect I can see that together we were allowing an environment for moments of inter-subjective becoming within ‘confusion, paradox and imprecision’ (Law, 2008).

I have come to understand that my methodology, an integration of both practice and theory, requires a liminal process in order to explore ‘confusion, paradox and imprecision’ (Law, 2008). When I was working at the Community Garden my reluctance to conform to the requirements of

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48 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/poppy/sketchingfriend.html
49 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/poppy/etching.html
the Institution reminded me of a pertinent question that I was asked nine months after basing my research practice in my allotment. ‘Do you consider yourself artist, or citizen, at your allotment?’ At the time of asking, the question caused me confusion. Heath Bunting describes himself not as activist but as public artist, which he says allows him ‘reach’ (Bunting, 2008). As artist I suggest it is possible to avoid categorisation and confrontation that would arise as an activist in a conformist setting. Likewise, if ethical face-to-face encounter were to be described as citizenship this could impose a conformist structure that would undermine the possibility of communitas (Turner, 1969, 140). As artist, through the negotiation of boundaries, I have discovered that temporary connections can be made from which relation then becomes possible. During my conversation with Elaine, in my shed, (see Conformity or Nonconformity?) we discussed the terms ‘connective’ and ‘relational’ in terms of contemporary art (Lacy, 1995, Bourriaud, 2002). Elaine commented that, for her, relation follows on from connection. As I have already described, Emmanuel Levinas views every individual as valuable rather than as a constituent of a specific social order (Levinas, 1988, 172). He argues that in seeking relation we tend to assimilate the other and in this sense do them harm (see Chapter Two, Becoming Pacific). As artist, open to encountering individuals, particularly those who exist in the margins of a recognised socius, I engage in liminal processes through which communitas (Turner, 1969, 140) may develop and an overlapping (Young, 1990) can occur, not only with those who identify themselves within particular social groupings but also with those who do not. I have observed through my practice how relaxing artistic control through collaboration means that decision-making can then be a shared ethical process of exchange. This is evidenced through occasions of shared story making as well as within conversations in my shed. I arrived at these methods when working my allotment, in accepting my lack of control and witnessing the transformation of becoming through interventions of birds, animals and weather.

Grant Kester names a number of artists, including Mierle Laderman Ukeles, whose intentions appear, at least in part, to echo the ethics of Levinas, in choosing to put their artistic skills aside in favour of enabling acknowledgement for others (Kester, 2004,118). In ‘Handshaking Ritual,’ Ukeles experienced, 8,500 times, the moment Levinas describes whereby ‘the face is a hand in search of recompense’ (Levinas, 1998, 169). Ukeles lived out through her actions an act of reparation, to the people whose work, though indispensable, is usually not only unappreciated but often seen as degrading. The ritual she enacted became a repetitive and thorough act of restitution on behalf of, and as an example to, the rest of society in order to grant sanitation workers a more realistic sense of status; a hand held out, the meeting of eyes, followed by simple, spoken words of gratitude. Ukeles seemed to perform as mediator between sanitation workers and the rest of society. Kester gives credence to art in which it may be the choice, and indeed the practice, of some artists to listen, rather than to impose their own ideas. They allow themselves to become catalysts for new understanding through sustained empathic exchange and its analysis (Kester, 2004,118). Kester’s comment describes my practice and research to a degree. However, Kester says of artists who listen, ‘Their sense of artistic identity is sufficiently
coherent to speak as well as listen’ (ibid.), but that it is a choice they make rather than imposing their own expertise. My practice and research is less preconceived. I do not see myself as having put aside my coherent artistic identity in approaching others. I do however, paradoxically approach with a sense of open-ended expectancy. For example, when the students came to my allotment and we shared in story making together, each story began with my simple matter-of-fact descriptions in the form of a guided tour. I suggest that in engaging with others I am not therefore denying a part of my experience but that in choosing to work within day-to-day life, preferring lifelike art to artlike art (Kaprow, 1993, 211), the risk of appearing more knowledgeable, or having more expertise, than others with whom I am engaged is diminished. In Trading Dirt (Kelley, 2004, 212) Kaprow used the soil that passed between people as a catalyst that embodied the transformative process. The soil therefore took centre stage allowing the artist to be freed from the role of performer. Kaprow’s work became collaborative during the process of exchange and conversation surrounding the procedure. I have come to recognise that when I wonder where and what my practice is, I am usually moving on to something new and interesting. I have learned that an important characteristic of a process of becoming is unpredictability.

When Patrick Simons (gloriousninth, 2009) came to talk with me in my shed we discussed ethical issues in relation to community art and the artist’s role in these settings. He described some of the many, mostly urban, community art projects in which he has been employed. Patrick’s comments have helped me to understand my practice as separate from community art that may have pre-conceived aims and targets. Community art projects of this kind often do not meet the needs of the people on whom the project is focused, but instead become political ammunition when both community and artists are commodified by a political issue. Patrick described a project in which he was required, as community artist, to gather memories from the inhabitants of a block of flats that was due for demolition. The aim was to give a human face to neighbourhood regeneration. The tenants of the flats were, however, not in favour of the demolition project and were unhappy about their imminent relocation, but the community art project did not make this clear in its outcomes. Patrick suggested that some community art can be upholding a lie, in the course of fulfilling the aims of funding bodies, and cites this as the reason why he no longer engages in community art projects of this kind (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/bottle/ps.html). We discussed tension and Patrick expressed his views about some participatory art lacking a tension that, he says, helps him identify art as successful (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/bottle/ps.html). He described his observation that some artists, when engaging participants in their work, finish the work themselves and in doing so iron out any tension. He said it is as though they feel the need to pass an arty hand over the work in order for it to be understood in terms of art. In doing this Patrick says they are relinquishing the very part of the work where meaning can be found.

50 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/bottle/ps.html (movie on left)
51 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/bottle/ps.html (movie on right)
Arts Collective BAVO draw a parallel with non-governmental organisation workers and artists whose intention it is to work for the good of all without advocating a political position (BAVO, 2007). BAVO criticise what they describe as ‘art without borders’, community art that keeps the peace rather than challenging injustice (ibid.). They insist that artists who choose to avoid commenting politically are operating to the detriment of society; simply meeting a social need is, BAVO say, contradicting political action by suppressing the need for radical change. BAVO suggest therefore that the outcome of ‘art without borders’ is that the government are able to abscond responsibility (ibid.). I have examined my practice to determine whether it could be described as ‘art without borders’ and have realised that it could not since I reflexively comment, and draw attention to small injustices, situations that I am involved in, which have been overlooked politically. In becoming pacific I am able to engage in conversations whereby I am quietly, yet subversively, challenging others’ preconceived ideas.

At a County Show I was invited to lunch in the President’s tent. I was conversing, with the man sitting next to me, about gardening. I was enthusing about growing vegetables and he told me he is a keeper of bees. I asked him whether it is true that mobile phone radiation disturbs the flight path of bees, to which he replied that recent research seems to be confirming this theory. I was then able to describe my friend in the woods, who was concerned about this issue, and his radical lifestyle in general, to which the man responded with warmth and intrigue.

My methodology that is an integration of my day-to-day life as artist, citizen and activist, has the appearance of being non-confrontational but is actively, though quietly, dissenting political injustice through art that is embodied in day-to-day encounter. Sited in a gallery and asking the question ‘what are the advantages and disadvantages of a nonconformist lifestyle?’ suggested that my previous project, nonconformist operated as activism. However, as I have described, this was not the most significant part of the project in retrospect. Despite my presence in the gallery, for the duration of the exhibition, in conversation with visitors, I found the same suspicion from gallery visitors that I had from other dog-walkers when they saw me with my camera during my daily walk in Bakewell (see Chapter One, Day-to-Day Process). I have discovered through my practice that being visible, even engaging in dialogue, may inspire reconsideration but is not necessarily sufficient to encourage effect in others. My contention is that the Levinasian moment, before words, when the face of the other becomes more important than oneself (Levinas, 1988, 169), this moment embodies affective, ethical, inter-subjective becoming.
Chapter Four: Readymade Situations

4.1 Quiet Activism

In the mid 1980’s, when I was living in Lancashire, close to a British Nuclear Fuels base, I took part in a series of weekly vigils where we stood in silence by the fence to which we attached a single flower as we left. One weekend there was a carnival planned outside the fence, at the base, and I went along. I was shocked when people began painting slogans on the road and damaging property and I took my leave.

I cite this situation to demonstrate my own preference towards quiet activism (Eisenmann, 2007) as a means to change, though I recognise more overt activism as appropriate in certain circumstances. The regular vigils maintained a constant atmosphere of resistance but they alone could have been easily ignored. Civil disobedience, embodied in painted slogans and fence cutting, caused an immediate reaction and generated publicity. Both types of action alerted public attention to a situation that had been overlooked and also set up a tension between the demonstrators.

Artists who particularly interest me are those who engage with tension, drawing out discrepancies in state structures and ideological systems that are otherwise overlooked. The Street Art Group (GAC) is a collective of eight artists in Argentina. Their aim is ‘to infiltrate traditional communication systems and “subvert the message”’ (GAC) (Valente, 2011). The GAC operate quietly, but directly, their clear messages have a precise aim. On one occasion they joined a pilgrimage to a local church named after the patron saint of work. In collaboration with organisations of unemployed people (ibid.) they distributed small images of the saint, which is customary practice on a pilgrimage. However, instead of the usual prayer, printed on the reverse, they had printed a suggestion to reduce the working day by two hours to accommodate a more equal distribution of employment. I have described this action to demonstrate the specific difference in my own approach to change. The GAC’s work is reactionary, they are ‘infiltrating’ and ‘subverting’ (ibid.), mine is interactionary, not a set of one-off statements but an ongoing, unfolding methodology in day-to-day life. I am not suggesting answers to social issues but simply drawing attention to what may have been overlooked and asking questions that encourage ethical interaction.

Another means to describe my particular approach is by contrasting it with an argument raised by BAVO (2007) who propose ‘over-identification’ as a way that artists can draw attention to social injustice. They suggest that when artists exaggerate an issue they can demonstrate what governments may be covering up with carefully worded policy documents. As an example they cite theatremaker, Christoph Schlingensief, whose intervention, Bitte Liebt Osterreich! (2000) in Vienna, consisted of a reality television show in a shipping container, for which the contestants
were asylum seekers. The rules of the show involved contestants being voted off, which meant their having to leave the country. BAVO describe this action as negative over-identification. Schlingensief was deliberately subverting a recognisable social medium (the reality show), in an abhorrently unethical manner to draw attention to, and thereby protest against, an extreme right wing party joining the Austrian government (BAVO, 2007). BAVO say, whilst positive over-identification is still effective, negative over-identification is more provocative. In considering my practice, I recognise my action at the eviction of the traveller’s site could be described as positive over-identification (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/carrotman/support.html). I carried a sign problematising the introductory prayer, communally voiced in the council chamber, prior to their vote to evict. I had attended the meeting, in solidarity with the travellers, and joined in the prayer and was therefore including myself in the question, ‘Do we forgive those who trespass against us in Penwith?’ In asking an open question, I was creating an overlapping, rather than polarising, tension with the local council. I describe this overlapping tension as interactionary rather than reactionary and, as such, more appropriate in a semi-rural setting where the possibility of informal face-to-face meetings with local councillors is more likely to occur than in an urban setting. A further purpose for describing this action, that took place some years before my current research, is that I now consider it to be part of my practice as an artist, whereas I had not previously understood it in those terms. At the time I saw my practice as taking place alone in my studio and involving paint and canvas, or clay. I now recognise that what was happening in my life, separately from what I then described as my art practice, was in fact more significant and meaningful than the paintings and pots I was making. As such, I have come to understand that whilst it is the artist’s prerogative to decide what does or does not constitute their art, art’s meaning can alter or be discovered in retrospect and that it is not only the prerogative of the authoring artist to find meaning in the work.

Ukeles’s deliberately visible *Handshaking and Thanking Ritual* set up a tension in the mainstream art world which, over the years, has resulted in altered, more sensitised points of view of both art world audiences and commentators. Sited in the context of the New York Department of Sanitation, and working with the medium of waste disposal and maintenance Ukeles set out to ‘eliminate cultural boundaries’ (Ukeles, 1995) and expose the previously othered process of waste disposal. To some extent she achieved her aim, symbolically and profoundly, in the enactment of a gestural ritual. Suzi Gablik recounts an occasion when she and Hilton Kramer nearly came to blows, at a conference, in connection with a discussion about Ukeles’s *Touch Sanitation* (Gablik, 2002, 29-31). Gablik resolved, after reflecting on the argument, to be more sensitive to other peoples’ entrenched positions after she realised how threatening it can be when one’s worldview is profoundly challenged. Having heard Gablik’s description of the project Kramer vehemently stated that Ukeles’s shaking hands with sanitation workers was not in any way related to the making of art (ibid.). Kramer who advocated that all art be locked away in galleries qualified his comments by saying, ‘Solutions to social or

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52 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/carrotman/support.html
environmental problems will never take place in an art gallery... because the only problems art can solve are aesthetic ones’ (Gablik, 2002, 29-31). The gallery represents a structure that must be understood within a certain set of protocols, insists Kramer, which renders art relatively powerless in affecting our day-to-day living. I would argue that Touch Sanitation continues its own becoming; its meaning and relevance are still unfolding forty years later as a result of the mess of argument and debate (Kenning, 2008, 1-4). I agree with Kramer that art galleries tend to prescribe a particular set of protocols that can render art relatively powerless in affecting day-to-day living. I recognise this state of affairs is contested by some artists who engage with galleries, but my decision to choose quiet activism has resulted in an inclination to mostly work independently of galleries and other hierarchical structures, preferring instead what I describe as readymade situations. The basis Ukeles was adhering to in engendering her work as art was in claiming her right to freedom as an artist, as referred to in Manifesto (Ukeles, 1969), ‘If I have the freedom to call anything art, I’m going to call necessary work art’ (Moorman, 1984). By necessary, Ukeles is referring specifically to maintenance work, both in the home and in the public domain. My practice, which often occurs privately and sometimes publicly, shifts the focus in that I avoid structure, preferring liminality (see Chapter Three, Communitas). Where Ukeles’s Handshaking and Thanking Ritual had a clearly defined intention, my practice remains responsive to chance, resists definition and is speculative. For these reasons it requires retrospective evaluation.

Authorship has become problematic within my practice, partly because I rarely produce anything that can be quantified and I mostly work with others collaboratively in informal settings. The community garden, that materialised out of a conversation in which I described my practice-led allotment research was subsumed into a project with entirely different motives and became unworkable for me, but continues in its new context (see Chapter Three, Tension and Interaction). In letting go of authorship, in the sense of an artist setting out to create work with a particular meaning, I find it is possible to reconsider the meaning of my work retrospectively. Since my identity as artist has shifted this has resulted in a re-adjustment of my understanding of what constitutes art. I have realised that what I thought was a digression from my art practice, I now understand as the site of new meaning, since my creative process that was once solitarily located in a studio, is now embodied in day-to-day life.

The day-to-day process of bread making has been brought into play as art by a number of artists. Allan Kaprow's book of essays, Blurring the Boundaries Between Art and Life (Kaprow, 1993, 242), ends with a recipe for bagels. Kaprow invites his readers to follow his recipe from his book about art thereby experiencing for themselves the blurring of art and life. In an ‘exchange situation' at the Copenhagen Free University in 2002, called You Forgot To Put Your Hair On (CFU, 2002), the making of ciabatta bread became a celebration of 'no hierarchy of valid experiences’ (ibid). It was suggested that yeast is equally as interesting a material as paint
or videotape. It was noted that in an informal setting the making of ciabatta bread became a passionate exercise, highlighting how the interplay between seriousness and joking is more easily negotiated informally, between friends, than in a more formalised educational setting such as a University seminar. This question of informality corresponds with my own understanding of the difference between art in structured and informal environments. Kate Southworth and Patrick Simons (Gloriousninth, 2009) created a sourdough starter in their kitchen at home and sent it out into the world to be grown and cared for by a curator prior to its splitting and passing on to another curator and hence, ad infinitum; the sourdough thus increasing in cultural density and value in the process. I had arranged, in June 2009, to visit ‘Somewhere Else’, a community in Liverpool, to which I have previously referred (see Chapter Two, Negotiating Boundaries), which was, then, overseen by Barbara Glasson. She described a pattern whereby the regular process of bread making ‘sets the pace’ for community interaction. I wanted to share with them my process of collaborative story making and took this opportunity to collaborate with Gloriousninth (ibid.) in volunteering to co-curate the sourdough culture with the ‘Somewhere Else’ community. Together we made sourdough rolls as part of the twice-weekly bread making ritual. The rolls, that we each fashioned into a variety of symbolic objects, became the material for stories and subsequently food for the birds at various locations in the City\(^{53}\) (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/bottle/cultural_capital.html).

My practice radically altered when, in 2001, I was faced with ethical questions after making work depicting the lives of others. My friend Dieter’s reflection, about my work at the time, ‘the paintings say more about you’ (see Chapter Three, Artist, Citizen or Activist?), was astute and catalytic to my practice. I continued to wrestle with ethical questions whilst experimenting with new ways of representing others through my work, but was continually faced with the work saying more about me. In acknowledging my day-to-day life as my art practice, however, I find I am able to recognise myself as the centre of the work and then work outwardly from whichever position I find myself in. My understanding of Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the rhizome as metaphor, such as couch grass, is helpful in explaining my process (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004b, 10). The rhizome is evidenced in my pacific, quietly activist practice through various small encounters and projects that I describe as readymade situations. I have discovered momentary or temporary environments to be most receptive to a rhizomatic process; those controlled by established structures tend to other the rhizome as an uninvited alien (see Chapter One, Day-to-Day Process). The new allotment site in St.Ives is riddled with couch grass and my fellow allotmenteers are finding various methods of waging war on it and attempting to inhibit its growth.

\(^{53}\) [http://www.laurawild.co.uk/bottle/cultural_capital.html](http://www.laurawild.co.uk/bottle/cultural_capital.html)
4.2 Gentle Politics

Throughout my thesis I have demonstrated anecdotally, how a reflexive approach involves being immersed in process, responding to day-to-day occurrences and then finding meaning, in retrospect. Working with my friend rebuilding the allotment walls was, at the time, my attempt to control a neighbour’s interventions and subsequently emerged as mutually affective for my wall building friend and myself. Making and distributing jam was intended initially to be a way of using the proliferation of fruit that appeared in autumn\(^54\) (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/jam.html). In retrospect plum harvesting and jam making became a means to inter-subjective becoming occurring firstly, with my daughter in working out our shared grief for our friends who had died, then in my distribution of it, as jam, amongst friends and neighbours\(^55\) (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/chutney.html). Subsequently it has also appeared in Barbara Glasson’s exposition of these actions within her writing (Glasson, 2009). I have therefore come to understand the meaning of art as a developmental process, rather than solely the prerogative of the authoring artist. I suggest readymade situations contest how life may be lived subjectively and affectively.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, whose work exists as art in a community setting but not as community art, acknowledged the lead of Marcel Duchamp, in describing ordinary objects as art objects (Moorman, 1984). She suggested the time had come to see ‘ordinary’ in its ordinary place and still recognise it as art. She explained that she had extended Duchamp’s notion of the readymade by acknowledging ordinary objects in the environment in which they are found. My understanding and use of the word, ordinary, differs from Ukeles’s in that I use it to suggest that which is ordinary to each individual, in other words the substance of each individual’s day-to-day life. What is ordinary life for one may appear extra-ordinary to another, and vice-versa. The context in which Ukeles uses the word ordinary is in relation to the disposal of waste, the readymade material that she perceived to be collectively othered by society, together with the people employed to remove it. Ukeles intended to draw attention, very publicly, to this political issue (Ukeles, 1995). In the context of my practice, which I interpret as my day-to-day life, I propose chance occurrences within my life could be described as readymade situations that tend to emerge through process, often as a result of loss or letting go and generally through an attitude of attentiveness. Duchamp’s readymades were framed as art within a gallery, thereby contesting art, objectively and conceptually (Zepke, 2008, 35-36). Alternatively, Guattari’s rethinking of the notion posits the readymade as having potential for subjective affect (ibid, 33). Guattari asserts that the readymade object provokes a series of sensory affects as a result of reminiscence about similar objects as well as imaginary engagement with mythical, social, historical and even sentimental references (ibid, 34). As such, Guattari’s perception of the readymade describes conclusions I have arrived at through practice, in gleaning other people’s

\(^{54}\) http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/jam.html
\(^{55}\) http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/chutney.html
leftovers at the allotment and particularly in shared story making that I have engaged in with various groups and temporary communities. It is the Guattarian sense of the term ‘readymade’ that I engage with in proposing my own term readymade situations. Stephen Zepke describes the practice of Adrian Piper who sites her work, as I do, in the encounter between others and herself, outside of art institutions that inherently prescribe the roles of spectator or participant (ibid, 41). Catalysis IV (Piper, 1970) was a performance work in which Piper travelled through the City of New York with a white towel pushed into and partially hanging out of her mouth. The sight of her, I am assuming, would have affected passers-by, causing unspoken questions to be raised in peoples’ minds concerning difference. Piper intended the effect of the encounter not to be recognised as art by those who encountered it directly (Zepke, 2008, 42). In this way the encounter was not seen theatrically but as immanent within life and, as such, the embodiment of political affect (ibid).

‘Indeed, this is the startling conclusion that the ‘affectual’ lineage of the readymade implies, that by placing art in the midst of life, by making it the vital mechanism of life’s own process of becoming, art provides not only the condition, but the criteria of any revolutionary politics’ (Zepke, 2008, 42).

Fig. 14. Catalysis IV, Adrian Piper, 1970

My own rendering of immanence in a public space is less confrontational. I aim as an artist to be vigilant, to listen out for, respond to and allow space for potential moments. Such readymade situations in the form of invitations, conversations, small interactions and liminal opportunities often occur as the result of co-incidence. I prefer to sit on benches in the small City of Truro in which I live, where I might make observations in a notebook and welcome encounters if they occur, an act that is nevertheless political in my choice to use the city for a purpose other than one involving capital. As I have noted previously I have, mostly, lived in rural or small town settings where face-to-face encounter is a part of day-to-day life. I now live in a city, which,
albeit small, is the main centre for commerce in the County of Cornwall. As such face-to-face recognition sometimes occurs, but there is the sense in which most people arrive and depart, as they do in a metropolis, buying, selling and banking. When I visit the city centre for a purpose other than one involving the transfer of money, it feels liberating and transgressive to arrive without a wallet, but with just my notebook in my pocket; an action I have copied from my sketching friend whom I met in St.Ives in 1989 (see Chapter Three, Artist, Citizen or Activist?). Differing from a flaneur’s aloof demeanour (Buck-Morss, 1989), or a psychogeographer’s analytically intentional derives (Keiller, 1999), I wander and wonder at situations and things that are invisible to me when I am visiting the city for commercial reasons. Face-to-face encounters, occurring with others not previously known, then become readymade situations and as such the embodiment of gentle, political acts. This practice has led to my becoming more receptive to potential situations that I might otherwise have spurned.

*Given the choice, I would naturally prefer to spend three hours planting potatoes but I reluctantly agreed to accompany my husband to a formal luncheon to which we were invited. We were to enjoy the hospitality of local aristocracy together with other guests who were representatives from the public services. In retrospect the experience was an interesting one. I decided beforehand to practice passivity and therefore be respectful of the generous invitation and not overtly confrontational in conversation. This attitude resulted in intriguing, warm conversation about family life, military service, art and gardening. I realise how everything about the formal structure of this occasion actually provided a safe space in which to openly and honestly share personal, heart-felt matters with people who I may never have the opportunity to talk with again.*

In examining the relevance of this experience the formal meal served as a readymade situation, by which I mean a situation that was not constructed by me, as artist. I was presented with an opportunity to discuss my work alongside others whereby neither they or I, in meetings of difference, lost our overall sense of identity (Young, 1990), (see Chapter Three, Tension and Interaction). Instead there was time, the duration of the meal, and place for each other’s awareness of the world to be reconsidered and marginally altered. It began with a comment about mowing the lawn from a man who introduced himself as a former soldier. He described the activity as time apart from an otherwise frenetically busy working life. The ordinary activity of repetitive mowing enabled a conversation in which I introduced the notion of subjective becoming, as open-ended process, an attitude that was challenging to someone who chronicled his perception of living as a set of strategically organised operations. Guattari examines the dynamic taking place when art meets day-to-day life in this way, focusing on ‘segment of the real’ (Guattari, 1995, 131). He says that a fragment of life seen in terms of art is then perceived, and sensed, differently allowing for the reshaping of the subjectivity of both artist and other (ibid.). The artwork that in this instance was an exchange, in the form of our conversation over lunch, I suggest, provided the potential for alerting our senses and slightly affecting us both
(ibid). Nicolas Bourriaud might describe this conversation as a ‘social interstice’ (Bourriaud, 2002, 14), by which he repositions the term interstice, used by Marx to describe alternative economies operating outside the Capitalist framework (ibid. 16). The term interstice, meaning ‘stand between’, embodies a tension in itself since as a noun it appears as a verb. I suggest my art practice, which functions in this way as a verb rather than a noun, operates inter-subjectively, remains un-graspable as a commodity and occurs, through liminal process.

4.3 Liminal Process

Returning from my dog walk one day I noticed a transparency that, I assumed, had spilled out of a bag of rubbish on the day of its kerbside collection. I realised I had been gleaning after the council workers but, more remarkable than this serendipitous illustration of my research, is the subject the transparency depicts. Painted in the mid fourteenth century by Guariento of Padua, the image portrays ‘Angel Weighing a Soul’. This metaphor, presenting the ultimate rite of passage between life, death and a suggested thereafter, demonstrates vulnerability and tension as inherent to limen.

Fig.15. Angel Weighing a Soul, Guariento, 14th Century

In the summer of 2008 we relocated to Cornwall and I was in a liminal process of transition, adjusting to my surroundings and tentatively revisiting friends and situations I had been involved with when we had previously lived in the county.56

I was stopped in my tracks by a phone call from Derbyshire telling me that my father was to go into hospital to investigate his loss of strength and increasing breathlessness. I had a sense that he would not return home… I was staying with my friend Barbara, a few miles from the hospital, when my father died. Her cottage was in the process of

56 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/carrotman/poly.html
being renovated and was a building site, full of dust. Despite this state of affairs I had decided it would be appropriate to spend the weekend making chutney and quince jelly from fruit given to me by my new neighbours in Cornwall. I remembered how transformative this process had been for my daughter Phoebe, and me, the year before. We had made jam from the proliferation of plums that we discovered on returning to my allotment from mourning the passing of our daughters' godparents, who died together in a car crash. So, Barbara and I had a jelly bag suspended from the builder’s stepladder and quinces bubbling in a pan when I was called to the hospital for the last time

[http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/dad.html](http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/dad.html).

Having filled in my friend’s grave, experiencing the significance of digging and interring, I suggested to my mother that we take a spade with us to the burial of my father’s ashes. The undertaker was a little surprised but said it saved him a job and so we took it in turns, my mother and brother and our partners and children, to fill in the hole and stamp down the earth, an action that I noticed was particularly cathartic for my young nephews who had been quite overwhelmed by the formal ritual of the funeral the day before. By working the ground and digging in the soil we all found we were able to return to our day-to-day lives after this liminal process, in which death and life seemed to blur into one.

My father had been a mining engineer so his ‘being underground’ was a part of day-to-day conversation in our family. When I came across an opportunity for artists called Edgecentrics, a proposed exhibition in a set of underground tunnels, I was intrigued, particularly since ‘The Williamson Tunnels’ are located under the City of Liverpool. On my next visit to Liverpool after baking bread with Barbara’s community at ‘Somewhere Else’, she and I went for a guided tour of the tunnels that are accessed from an old stable yard at Edge Hill (Williamson’s Tunnels, 2008).

The story goes that Joseph Williamson, an eccentric philanthropist, employed soldiers returning from the Napoleonic Wars to engage with his obsession for tunnelling and create an extraordinary underground network, for no particular purpose. Gaps in the story stirred my imagination and I decided to volunteer as a digger for a day, joining the team who were undertaking the ongoing work. The tunnels had been used as a rubbish dump after Williamson’s death, resulting in the unearthing of fascinating fragments of non-perishable waste such as broken ceramics, toys and tools. Barbara accompanied me and we returned to the tunnels for a Saturday in March 2008. It was not just our gender difference that separated us from the other volunteer ‘diggers’. We were viewed with suspicion from the start, particularly by the older generation of men there. However, we worked hard all day and by the end of it we had established dialogues with those we were working closest to.

57 [http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/dad.html](http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/dad.html)
My exhibit for Edgecentrics was an invitation to share in story making and comprised of a series of books representing each of the objects found when reaching into a bucket, like a ‘lucky-dip’. I also exhibited an album of photographs, a record of the day when we had joined the diggers. I donated these to the Heritage Centre that accompanies the Williamson Tunnels.

I borrowed the books containing the stories written during the course of the Edgecentrics exhibition, in order to scan the contents. They were sitting on a shelf in the office when I arrived and I wondered if they had been forgotten, or overlooked, so I asked whether or not they wanted them returned. The same man who had been resolutely and consistently dismissive of our presence during the day of digging said, ‘yes’, which felt to me like a measure of success as it marked an agreed overlapping of our different identities.\(^{58}\) (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/bottle/edgecentrics.html).

The Edgecentrics exhibition itself was a means to interact with those who took part in writing the stories but far more significant was the opportunity to work alongside the group of Liverpudlian volunteers who gave up their Saturdays to clear a rubbish dump and re-discover a remarkable underground folly. Barbara and I felt it a privilege to have had the opportunity of working alongside them. During the day of digging there were the usual, regular flow of visitors being led through the tunnels by a tour guide. These visitors were required to wear hard hats and not to venture beyond the path. The diggers wore no protective headgear, which suggested to me a rawness in their approach that was a significant part of this liminal process, an unspoken resistance to being ‘fixed in structure’ (Turner, 1969, 128). We, as diggers, rather than visitors experienced how ‘we may catch glimpses of that unused evolutionary potential in [hu]mankind which has not yet been externalised and fixed in structure’ (ibid.). Barbara and I became deliberately passive, obedient to the established diggers, which enabled us, in that particular environment, to explore a limen between art and life.

A friend, whose transport was by horse and cart, lived in a bender on farmland and kept goats. He and the two or three others who also lived there were ‘squatters’ but they had befriended the elderly farmer who owned the land and their relationship became one of reciprocal support. The situation became less tenable with the ‘Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, 1994’ (OPSI, 2010). The Council informed the farmer of his duty to evict anyone squatting his land and the implications of his failure to do so, which could result in his own prosecution. Two years previously and less than ten miles away was the travellers’ site, mentioned previously (see Quiet Activism), that was evicted following a campaign of hate by nearby residents. What surprised me about this situation and the eviction of the traveller’s site was the ability of the squatters to accept change.

\(^{58}\) http://www.laurawild.co.uk/bottle/edgecentrics.html
Allan Kaprow’s *Trading Dirt* (Kelley, 2004, 212), (see Chapter One, *Gleaning*) playfully, and solemnly, demonstrates change, engendered by liminal process. He uses the term ‘blurring’ to describe the position of his practice, between art and life (Kaprow, 1993). Kaprow also advocates a blurring of disciplines that he describes as contamination (Kaprow, 1993, 105). I see a connection with Chantal Mouffe’s suggestion that dissensus rather than consensus is a way to draw attention to the antagonistic rather than contingent nature of social order (Mouffe, 2008, 6-13), (see Chapter Three, *Conformity or Nonconformity?*). I suggest Kaprow’s contamination operates by means of dissensus, as opposed to cohesion that requires consensus (iCoCo, 2010). *Trading Dirt* (Kelley, 2004, 212), in which Kaprow repeatedly exchanged his own, with other people’s, bucketfuls of soil is, therefore, a performance of contamination. By introducing soil from one context into another he, ironically, increased the material’s cultural value in the process. He had no fixed timescale or pre-conceived agenda for the project (ibid.) and in his description of *Trading Dirt*, admits to forgetting all about it for months at a time. The action of exchanging soil could be described as the unsettling of the material itself, which in turn unsettled the collaborators taking part in the exchange. Unlike governmental attempts to smooth over discrepancy (iCoCo, 2010) Kaprow was exploring the stirring up of material to see what effect it might have on him and his collaborators in terms of chance and change.

When I was re-building the walls with my friend on my allotment I had a sense for the first time, since moving to Derbyshire three years previously, of being settled and comfortable in a place. I articulated this to my friend who said that in his own experience, whenever he had begun to feel comfortable anywhere, the feeling had been shortly followed by upheaval of some kind. It is therefore probably no coincidence,
fortuitous even, that within a few days of this conversation I learned we would soon be relocating to Cornwall\(^5\) (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/spade/leaving.html).

Whilst acknowledging that being uprooted through relocation is very different to being exiled, I feel the reflections of Vilem Flusser, concerning becoming unsettled, have relevance for both situations (Flusser, 2004). Flusser, who was exiled from Czechoslovakia and suffered exile in many different ways since (ibid, 2), writes of expulsion as a catalyst to new, creative ways of living (ibid, 2). Flusser warns of the anaesthetic comfort of habit (see Chapter One, *Habitual Process*), a state denied to one who has been exiled or expelled (ibid.). He suggests that the uprooted person, the exile, may at first attempt to uproot everything around themselves in an attempt to establish new roots but in so doing discovers that human dignity requires not having roots at all, since they can be binding (ibid, 3).

‘Human beings are even more rootless than other animals, and when they do search out their roots, one gets a vegetable impression of them. Truly rooted and settled people (to the extent that they exist in reality and not just in ideology) are experientially impoverished shrubs. To be a human being in the true sense of the word, one has to be unsettled’ (Flusser, 2003, 25).

Given this realisation Flusser suggests the expelled is no longer the victim of the expeller but the one who has freedom to move at will (ibid. 4). The comfortable pleasures purveyed by habit are always a temptation, but in remaining a stranger, being different, an exile is able to synthesise new information. This uncomfortable role of catalyst has benefit not only for the exile but also for the native as it causes a ‘breeding ground for creative activity’ (ibid, 5). Flusser proposes that if expulsion forces the exile to be creative, then maybe the reverse is also true and it is the destiny of those who are creative to be positioned as those forced to be expelled? (ibid, 5). My suggestion is that this proposition, by Flusser, has relevance for an art practice that attends, through liminal process, to what is overlooked politically and socially. The question appears as the last, but possibly not final, remark in a paper that ends, mysteriously, mid-sentence.

‘Being expelled means being forced to become other, and to be other than the others. Therefore this is not only about a geographic phenomenon: one is somewhere else after the expellation. This is also about a phenomenon of freedom: one is forced to be creative. In this sense the equation expellation = creation may be turned around: Not only is every expelled forced to be creative, but also everyone who is creative sees himself forced to be expelled. This turnaround of the equation, with a question mark set, is the motivation ’ (Flusser, 2004, 5).

\(^5\) http://www.laurawild.co.uk/spade/leaving.html
4.4 Immanent Invisibility

According to Vilem Flusser creativity thrives in a state of unsettlement. I suggest becoming unsettled can be embodied as passion, which can be a symptom of desire for change. Rosi Braidotti says, ‘Politics begins with our passions’ (Braidotti, 2002, 61). Braidotti suggests the spirit of any transgressive movement is typified by ‘a lightness of touch, a sense of opening up of possibilities, a profound empowerment of the potentials of life’ (ibid.). She expresses how it is crucial not to become overly absorbed in the seriousness of political issues and to give credence to what she describes as ‘the merry-making aspect of the process of social change’ (ibid.). Braidotti encourages a ‘deeply embedded vision of the embodied subject’, which she describes as ‘radical immanence’ (ibid.). I referred earlier in the chapter to Copenhagen Free University and their simple exercise of making ciabatta bread. I suggest that in this instance those taking part in the bread making process experienced a sense of *immanent invisibility* made possible by a lack of hierarchy that together with a day-to-day process and ‘merry-making’ was embodied in shared passion. The bread making process became a ‘vehicle for learning…’ as Owen Adams described his practice of shared compost making, ‘…a tool to get you involved and lead you somewhere you don’t know’ (see Chapter Three, *Communitas*). In my practice I have begun to engage with others from a position of immanent invisibility thereby diverting the focus away from competition and instead allowing the process to become a ‘vehicle for learning’. In these settings I look for a process that is relevant to the given situation and preferably one in which I am novice. I have found that little knowledge of a process results in a more playful attitude to collaboration, as opposed to a situation where I am viewed as the artist in possession of skills to which others aspire. The conference I was invited to in Salisbury (see Chapter Three, *Communitas*), demonstrates how I came to this new understanding. I was invited to guide a group of adults on a journey of creativity. I approached the situation by working together with a group of artist volunteers who set aside their own approach to making art and became amenuenses for people with severe physical disabilities. On another occasion I was invited to lead a pre-ordination quiet day for clergy. This was held in a small chapel on the edge of Delamere Forest. I proposed a collaborative story making activity in which each of us would find a spot in the forest and begin to write a story that we would all join in completing. The stories began with directions to each particular spot for writing60 (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/ball/delamere.html). I am currently engaging with a fluctuating group of individuals at a resettlement project in my hometown. Our project that is described by the organisation as an art group is exploring individual and inter-subjective identity.

On arrival at the project there are two entrances, one to the offices, the other for ‘service users’. Going through either of these areas takes you to a big room where it is possible to do laundry, store stuff and take a shower. This is where we hold our art workshops. It feels like a liminal kind of space. I work with whoever turns up,

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60 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/ball/delamere.html
uninterrupted by official issues. I met one of the group on his way there one morning so went in with him through the service user’s door, which pleased me.

Barbara Glasson, who was at the time of Edgecentrics living and working in Liverpool, has since moved to Bradford. She is searching for ways to listen to the diverse community, where the main topic of conversation is faith. Although not an art practice Barbara’s work has resonance with Dean Kenning’s comments about contradiction. ‘Rather than insipid visions of harmony where contradictions disappear, art’s final lesson might be a dialectic where antagonism and alliance, subjectivity and society, development and maintenance are no longer seen as opposing goals but each the necessary condition of the other’ (Kenning, 2008, 4). Barbara has discovered that her Muslim neighbours are not hoping for a politically and ethically homogenous blending of faith, they expect her to adhere to her Christian doctrine as devoutly as they do their own Islamic beliefs. When it was Eid her neighbours arrived at the door with a portion of every dish from their celebratory meal, an action that Barbara reciprocated at Christmas. This demonstrated a practical example of overlapping identity resulting in an attitude of acceptance, rather than threat, since neither party was attempting to assimilate the other. At a distance from Bradford, I am working in a very different community, as artist, but hearing about how diversity is lived out in that northern city has given me a new perspective on some philosophical concepts I have been grappling with concerning difference.

Towards the end of a day together in London my daughter, Phoebe, suggested we visit the ICA since one of her tutors had recommended the current exhibition to her. I had not at that time come across the work of Tino Sehgal and so asked at the desk on the way into the gallery for written information and was told the artist had requested for there to be no printed information or documentation. We were pointed in the right direction and only realised, when we found ourselves in the café, that we must have walked through and missed it altogether. We were then curious to discover what the work consisted of as the gallery we had walked through was a plain room with a group of primary school children and a couple of adults whom we assumed were engaged in an education programme. So, we went back into the gallery and were addressed by one of the children who asked if we’d like to join their game. We squeezed into the circle, sitting on the floor, and became involved in a game of ‘wink murder’. I soon learned that there was a murderer and a detective. The detective, who stood in the middle of the circle, was required to identify and accuse the murderer who was, in the meantime, catching the eye of one after another player who, once winked at, would wither to the floor as though dead. We played the game a number of times and then took our leave whilst thanking the children for inviting us to play.

What fascinated me about this particular exhibition of Tino Sehgal (Sehgal, 2007) was my own experience of it, given no prior understanding. I spent the next few days relating the work to
various people; I was clearly affected by it, so much so that I have no memory of the other
galleries we visited that day. Of the evident layers of meaning the most significant was the
strangeness of becoming part of an ordinary game, with children we’d never met before, in a
public space. I was struck by the juxtaposition of intimacy, in the meeting of eyes, with the threat
of violence that was implicit in the game itself and the vulnerability and yet power of the children
who were in command of it. We, the visitors, experienced a shifting of power both between adult
and child, and within the game, between murderer and victim. Sehgal’s exhibition at the ICA,
was entitled This Success, This Failure, (Sehgal, 2007), which seems to corroborate my own
preference to step aside from assessing art in terms of value.

Since 1993 Arts collective WochenKlausur have aimed to effect socio-political change through
small interventions in the environment of each art institution to which they are invited and from
which they operate. Prior to the start of each project the group undertake extensive research
into socio-political deficiencies in the area in which they are to be stationed. The projects
themselves usually last about eight weeks. Intervention To Aid Drug Addicted Women (Kester,
2004, 1) was based at Zurich’s Shedhalle (1994), and consisted of conversations, convened by
WochenKlausur, between sex-workers, activists, politicians and journalists during a series of
pleasure boat trips on Lake Zurich. The impartial setting allowed for a freedom of discussion
that would not have been possible in a civic building. Meeting in the contained environment of a
pleasure boat out on the water allowed opinions to be aired in an atmosphere of mutual respect,
beyond the usual social structures. The result of this particular project was the provision of a
safe house for drug-addicted women in Zurich. WochenKlausur consider their artistic creativity
to be their intervention into society and no longer a formal act of production. As artists they
enable unconventional methods for problem solving, whilst their projects continue to become
cultural capital within the art institution.

Fig.17. Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women, WochenKlausur, 1994-5

WochenKlausur and Sehgal are both drawing attention to what is socially overlooked. Sehgal addresses an
art audience through agents employed to work on his behalf and WochenKlausur work in the public
sphere to effect change. Both engage with art institutions to deliver their work as art. Stephen Wright endorses an approach that is not seeking visibility in this way, describing the work of some artists as having a ‘low coefficient of visibility’ (Wright, 2010). He describes the actions of the Street Art Group (GAC), whose aim it is to keep fresh in everyone’s minds the atrocities that took place in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. The work exists as small public interventions, street signs, that state openly and clearly the presence of a former perpetrator of violence, currently living on a particular street. The GAC intend their actions to prevent the violence from ever being repeated (Wright, 2008). As Wright says of those who ‘disappeared’ during this period of history, ‘… it is not their presence which is absent, but their absence which is so devastatingly present. In such circumstances, and others too, art must have the good grace to respect that absence with its own’ (ibid.). He is suggesting that the simple, impermanent street signs are more appropriate as an active reminder than a permanent memorial, which could never be commensurate with the level of grief experienced. Wright’s extreme example of a case for art becoming invisible demonstrates a sensibility that I echo with my own small gestures aiming to reveal the overlooked, through inter-subjective encounters, in day-to-day life. For me this has involved letting go much that once defined my identity as an artist and has resulted in my art practice and myself, as artist, becoming increasingly invisible.

In Chapter Three I raised a question: Why is there a need for artists to be forever renegotiating institutional frameworks and what are we, as artists, bringing to art and society in doing so? Through functioning in institutions WochenKlausur inevitably have to operate within timescales, schedules and budgets and although having the freedom to adopt unconventional methods, they are accountable to the funding institutions. A question is, who then controls the necessary ethical considerations? Acting, as I do, in liminal spaces, allows me a direct and less compromised approach. The GAC’s street signs, with their low coefficient of visibility, have a deliberate aim, whereas my practice is speculative and meandering. WochenKlausur’s projects are framed as ‘culture’ as a result of being sited in art institutions, whereas my practice mostly remains invisible to the mainstream art world.

Our neighbour died yesterday, waiting in his car while his wife was doing the shopping. An everyday death. He was a retired Cornish farmer cajoled into living in town by his wife who had put up with living two miles down a country lane for years… stranded… He compensated for town living by growing vegetables. These were no ordinary vegetables, they were gigantean and earned their nurturer a reputation in the form of rosettes and trophies at all the local shows. He was driven in his task and devoted to his charges from seed to maturity. His wife, despite gentle teasing to the contrary, was devoted to him. The finality of separation through death will be somewhat eased by the growth of potatoes and other crops he had planted, and which have already germinated, beginning their new lives under cloches in the ground that I see over my garden hedge.
After I relinquished my employment at the community garden (see Chapter Three, *Tension and Interaction*), I was considering what to do next. Three weeks after finishing work, and a few days after my neighbour died, I received a letter from St.Ives Town Council asking if I was still interested in taking up an allotment there (*St. Ives, 2010*)[^61] (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/pumpkin/stives.html), I had been on a waiting list for more than three years. I rang to say that I would indeed be interested. Within minutes of this call my husband told me that our neighbour’s wife and family had invited me to take on his vegetable plot. ‘He’s already dug it for her’, was what they had said and ‘otherwise it will be turned over to grass’. I was awestruck as this suggested a warmth and intimacy far deeper than I was aware of from these reserved, once-rural folk. Coupled with a sense of privilege was my feeling of inadequacy as to how I could possibly continue in this man’s footsteps since my methods of gardening are so contrary to his. However, I agreed in order to explore further opportunities to research the negotiation of physical and social boundaries. To begin with my neighbour’s family suggested the hedge between us would need a gate and some months later they asked if my hens could have a turn grazing their lawn and scratching out the moss growing there.

*My afternoon has been occupied in beginning to sow and plant my neighbour’s vegetable plot. His son-in-law was there too, cutting the grass and making the gap in the hedge between our gardens. He looked approvingly at what I was doing and described it as a tribute to the man who had nurtured that piece of ground for the last ten years*[^62] (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/spade/neighbours.html).

I trod carefully and respectfully in developing my neighbour’s garden that was originally intended more for winning prizes than for the provision of food and the following spring returned the plot to them as I had found it, freshly dug. Interactions with this close-knit and yet extensive family have contrasted in a number of ways to my working methods at my allotment in Derbyshire, and in St.Ives, where it has been possible to invite people to join with me in the process of becoming as well as interacting with other allotment tenants. My experience showed me how exchange, in the form of giving and receiving leftover seeds and produce, can become the currency for communication.

*I took a bag of shallots for planting and distributed them in handfuls to other allotment tenants who were there that day. I have since been given, in exchange, surplus seed potatoes, artichokes and conversation. My immediate neighbour declined my gift and remains the only one with whom I haven’t yet bonded.*

Victor Turner (who was contemporary with Allan Kaprow) draws the connection in his anthropological writing between hippy culture and communitas saying that they overlap in their

[^61]: http://www.laurawild.co.uk/pumpkin/stives.html
[^62]: http://www.laurawild.co.uk/spade/neighbours.html
attitude to structure. ‘Communitas is of the now; structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law, and custom’ (Turner, 1969, 113). I have discovered difficulties for my art practice that is ‘of the now’ or concerning ‘communitas’ when it is contained within a hierarchical structure. My experience has shown me that these methods dwell uncomfortably within imposed structures. I have found the need to conform to demands such as those required by employers or funding bodies, with agendas and time-scales, to be limiting and constrictive. I suggest art that exists as liminal process has the potential to embody all that is othered by society such as mess, loss, death, failure and confusion, thereby highlighting the otherwise overlooked. I suggest that not becoming bound to hierarchical structures and instead becoming immanently invisible may awaken the desire for a process of inter-subjective becoming. From a position of immanent invisibility, choosing to engage with the overlooked, artists may be able to quietly and gently challenge government initiatives such as ‘Community Cohesion’ (iCoCo, 2010) and ‘Big Society’ (Big society, 2011), that call for homogeneity, but which I consider to be unethical proposals designed to increase the potential of the powerful and further obscure the identity of others.

When wall building with my friend on my allotment in Derbyshire we were discussing a shared interest, the one thing on which we could actually agree. We had recognised that what we were performing together was more significant than the process of repairing a wall in the chill of winter. We were building a relationship of trust and in recognising this we were contemplating how it could be shared. We imagined a community which could welcome people accustomed to feeling socially marginalised and give them activities and space in which to unfold as individuals, an environment for becoming and, most importantly, not becoming anything in particular.

In conversation with Owen Adams, at my allotment, he described how he had made compost, with a team of people, which he considered to be a vehicle for learning, ‘a tool to get you involved and lead you somewhere you don’t know’. Owen was clear that our role as artists is to stand apart and see things from a different perspective with the purpose of moving towards new understanding (see Chapter Three, Communitas). He suggests this happens through the communication of intrigue, though he acknowledges how a desire for intrigue and wonder can result in art becoming over-dressed. Owen’s plea to dispense with cosmetically produced wonder has resonance with my practice of attending to that which is overlooked (http://www.laurawild.co.uk/carrotman/oa.html). During our conversation I voiced a concern I had held for some time about wanting my art to be useful. I have since let go of usefulness, as an intention, as I have realised that it is beyond my control. When the work sometimes becomes useful, by default, it occurs in its own way of becoming and not by my prescription. In the same way, I have understood the making of meaning to be emergent over time and not purely the prerogative of the authoring artist. Heath Bunting’s comment about his Status Project map of homelessness demonstrates this point, picking up on

63 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/carrotman/oa.html (movie on right)
socio-political hypocrisy and contradiction, and reflecting it back to society. Heath Bunting, and his colleagues, in the artist collective ‘irrational’ (Bunting, 2009a.), survey and map institutional status systems and the way different kinds of individuals navigate them. Their intention is to expose these systems and enable them to be more freely accessible. The implication, within the work, is that some institutions’ motives for accessibility, such as the Department of Health and Social Security, may not be altogether transparent (ibid.). Bunting’s notion of ‘reach’ in his art practice extends beyond his actions thereby affecting not just him, the artist. A homeless man looked at the Status Project map of homelessness that Bunting created whilst working on a collaborative art project in Newcastle (Bunting, 2009b.). He said, ‘Yeah, I get that’ and used it to navigate through the State System and eventually to find himself somewhere to live.

\[\text{During my conversation with Heath Bunting, in my shed, we discussed artists like him who put themselves at risk of physical harm. Heath commented that these actions have very precise boundaries or edges. He suggested that to endanger one’s reputation as an artist has its own risks. This comment was in relation to my description of having let go of an art practice, in which I had achieved a level of recognition, in order to change track mid-career in favour of a practice that involves becoming responsive to the circumstances of my day-to-day life.}\]

Reputation and recognition seem to require visibility, which I suggest may also require being rooted. Becoming, on the contrary, is a rhizomatic process and as such is easily overlooked. Deleuze and Guattari deliver a warning. ‘Make rhizomes, not roots. Never plant!’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004b, 27), Becoming can be arrested in its flow if, rather than accepting tension and upheaval as integral, complacency is settled for instead. My practice of immanent invisibility in readymade situations draws attention to what is overlooked. Becoming quietly and non-hierarchically present means I am able to exchange places with the overlooked and, in a Levinasian sense, the other becomes more important than myself (Levinas, 1988, 172), (see Chapter Two, Becoming Pacific). I have found a new sense of identity, as artist, by letting go of control in terms of intention and meaning. In doing so, I identify with Flusser’s description of the exile who discovers by default that not being rooted encourages an ability to ‘synthesise new information’ in a ‘breeding ground for creative activity’ (Flusser, 2004, 5).

\[\text{When I re-encountered my friend, who had worked for me years before as artist’s model (see Chapter Two, Gift or Exchange?), he asked me how my painting was going. I told him I wasn’t painting these days and to his next question about what I’m doing instead, I heard myself reply, ‘I seem to be becoming invisible’.}\]
Conclusions and Contribution to Knowledge

The thesis demonstrates an understanding I have arrived at through practice that art can most effectively emphasise what is overlooked in day-to-day life by becoming invisible to the mainstream art world. It is important to note, however, that becoming invisible does not equate with disappearing hence my use of the term immanent invisibility. I question assumptions that art and artists require visibility in order to be valued and suggest that recognition requires artists to conform, which thereby inhibits an open-ended process of becoming. I have, therefore, made a decision to engage in processes of day-to-day life, as art, which renders much of my work invisible but instead allows otherwise overlooked moments of encounter to unfold, which I describe as readymade situations. Adopting the metaphor of the rhizome has helped describe my process that ‘exists only to fill the waste spaces left by cultivated areas’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004b, 20). I discuss my process in terms of quiet activism and gentle politics because I have diligently avoided situations that force me to conform to dogma or ideology and instead have sought opportunities to connect with others in pacific processes of becoming. I have let go a long-held intention for my work to be socially useful, having recognised my resistance to commodification, though it may become useful by default. The majority of my working methods function as an anti-discipline whereby the rhizomatic process of day-to-day life allows the possibility for overlapping with others, a blurring of boundaries. I have discovered how liminal encounters can occur in ‘waste spaces left by cultivated areas’ (ibid.) drawing attention to what may have been overlooked. As I have suggested my methodology involves taking the risk of encounter, letting go of visible recognition and working within what may be tense and messy situations. Circumstances that have occurred during the years of my research have caused me to face change in unexpected ways, particularly through loss in terms of bereavement and relocation. Rather than othering these life changes in terms of my research I decided to reflect upon them as a necessary part of my research since they embodied my day-to-day life at the time. As a result, in the first two chapters my process and reflections are more parochial than the final two whereby, having been uprooted from my allotment in Derbyshire, my practice has become more dispersed, no longer confined within the walls of a specific plot. Around this time I was alerted to the work of Vilem Flusser by a friend who was then in the process of translating him (Roth, 2011). Flusser’s optimistic attitude to exile, and being unsettled in general, has enabled me to grasp my now scattered practice as opportunistic and in-keeping with my preference for speculative rather than strategic process. This is not to say, though, that such a methodological approach is easy but rather that negotiating tension and difficulties can open up otherwise unseen possibilities and occasionally result in serendipity.

I have, therefore, tested a method rather than proving a hypothesis and developed a methodology of practice-led research, which values art becoming invisible in the process of day-to-day life. My approach to research has involved an integration of practice with theory that is reflected in the text. Use of anecdotal passages throughout the text together with links in the
text to my website and web log demonstrate a reflexive approach to research. The printed thesis is accompanied by the thesis in two digital formats. Disc One allows for the reader to access hyperlinks with a connection to the Internet. Disc Two contains the thesis together with website files which means it can be read digitally, independently of the Internet, and therefore provides the requirement of a permanent copy. Whilst writing up my thesis I have dug a section of my neighbours plot each day, weather permitting, in order to return it to them as found, having cultivated it the previous season. Digging in this manner has contradicted my usually open-ended meandering method but was helpful to the writing up of my research, which also challenged my otherwise open-ended method of writing. The text is continually interrupted with day-to-day thoughts, actions or conversations that corroborate speculative, rather than strategic, process. The methodology allows a range of philosophical and theoretical perspectives to be drawn together with day-to-day process, some of which do not focus in any depth but bring into discussion situations, attitudes and people that may otherwise be overlooked. As such the methodology provides a means to ethical interaction in, what may be, tense and messy situations. Immanent invisibility, is how I describe my position as researcher, from which I am able to interact with others, in liminal processes that I have found to engender shared becoming.

I have referred throughout to Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s Touch Sanitation (1984), Allan Kaprow’s Trading Dirt (1983) and works of Heath Bunting (2002-2010). My reason for citing these three artists is their choice to work publicly and their desire for social change. They all work with material or process that is overlooked including waste disposal, soil, and institutional structure. I have discussed these and other artists to draw out difference, in terms of method and motivation, from my art practice.

Several questions have arisen during the course of the research that are all concerning ethics and so I will address them as a whole:

• Why is there a need for artists to be forever renegotiating institutional frameworks and what are we, as artists, bringing to art and society in doing so? (see Chapter Three, Conformity or Nonconformity?) Who then controls the necessary ethical considerations? (see Chapter Four, Immanent Invisibility)

• I began to wonder if a community project, working within a hierarchical structure, requires an agreed and shared ideology? (see Chapter Three, Tension and Interaction)

• Could Levinas’s ethical position be disabling in terms of inter-subjective becoming in that his reticence to do harm to the other could make it impossible to take the risk of engagement? (see Chapter Two, Becoming Pacific)

I have found solutions to all these questions in the Levinasian moment before words when the face of the other becomes more important than oneself (Levinas, 1988, 169). I have discovered the moment of mutual respect for one another’s difference, rather than disabling engagement
between one and the other, allows each the freedom to be themselves without fear of assimilation (Veling, date unknown). I have come to regard respect of this kind to be the means to connection with others who have very differing attitudes to my own, such as my wall-building friend (see Chapter Two, *Risking Encounter*), my friend in the woods (ibid.) and an ex-soldier at a formal meal (see Chapter Four, *Gentle Politics*). Julia Kristeva suggests that an ethical relationship cannot occur without severance (Kristeva, 1987, 254) and that connection occurs in an abyss, a contention I concur in my practice whereby grief and letting go become a means to subjective becoming, as can be understood in rites of passage (Fox & Gill, 2010). Vilem Flusser asserts that being rooted inhibits human creativity (Flusser, 2004, 5) and suggests that an uncomfortable state of being unsettled is catalytic to the synthesis of new information (ibid.). My experience of working in projects controlled by hierarchical structure have presented issues that were difficult to resolve; decisions about the ethos of a project, agreed between team members at the outset, when compromised by institutional targets can have a disempowering effect. Conforming to institutional requirements, as the only way to proceed, is a compromise I have found hard to observe. Reflecting on previous experiences of feeling marginalised and under-valued has shown me that imposed ideology of any kind can have the same effect. Victor Turner’s non-hierarchical notion of ‘communitas’ (Turner, 1969) has confirmed my choice to avoid imposed structure, as far as possible and, instead, to engage in liminal processes of immanent invisibility. I have come to understand Heath Bunting’s term ‘reach’ as a way for artists to be empowered by not conforming to any particular institution or structure and thereby remaining in control of the ethical considerations of one’s own work (Bunting, 2008). Ironically, being in control of ethical considerations makes it possible to let go in other ways, as evidenced in the practice of Allan Kaprow (Kaprow, 1983), thereby allowing for chance and change to occur. Day-to-day processes conducive to exchange (Mauss, 1993) are, therefore, where I choose to site my practice, whereby the remarkable can sometimes occur through the performance of unremarkable processes (Crouch, 2006). The overlapping of identity, rather than aggregation of communities (Young, 1990) is, I suggest, a possibility through passionate, playful, radically immanent processes (Braidotti, 2002), whereby the artists role is as guide in a new creative landscape (Olkowski, 1999); one in which art is acknowledged to be ‘a vehicle for learning; a tool to get you involved and lead you somewhere you don’t know’ (see Chapter Four, *Immanent Invisibility*).
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Illustration List

Fig.1. The Unexpected Seed. (2010). Laura Wild

Fig.2. Cabbages and Caterpillars. (2010). Laura Wild

Fig.3. Digging Carrots. (2007). Phoebe Wild


Fig.5. We‘Moon. (1995). We‘Moon ‘96. Oregon: Mother Tongue Ink, unpaginated, ‘Alsia Well in Cornwall/Kernow’, Monica Sjoo, 1993


Fig.7. Horseshoe and Cowslips. (2007). Laura Wild

Fig.8. Planting potatoes with Barbara on my plot. (2008). Laura Wild


Fig.10. Stones and Bluebells. (2008). Laura Wild

Fig.11. Meal at Taize. (2005). Steve Wild


Fig.15. Angel Weighing a Soul. (14th Century). Guariento

Fig.16. Laura, Phoebe and Timna in a bender under construction. (1992). Jane Irvine

Appendix 1: Web Log Content

Appendix 1.1

Monday, 30 April 2007

Allotment as Palimpsest

Thinking of the allotment as palimpsest – the fractions of stories it tells me leading to musings I have about it. Also the stories I bring to it and not only mine but those of all the invited as well as bird/animal/insect visitors that abide in it permanently, visit occasionally or travel over it but once.

Sandy is now feeling at home here, settling down to watch me work and doze in alternating patches of sunshine and shade that he moves in and out of according to his bodily thermostat. I’m sitting with my back to the shed, in the shade (Sandy prostrate next to me, head in the sun, haunches in the shade) looking at my now one-hand-span tall broad bean plants and emerging early potatoes which I could do to be earthing-up. Gently bending and swaying over these in the breeze are blackcurrant bushes full of flowers now turning to tiny green fruit already. 2 planes are making a kiss in the sky overhead for only a moment and then fading. The smell of earth, coffee and someone’s stew mingling with (probably the same person’s) lilac. I’m finding myself digging around 2 teazles, self-sown, in my salad and herb-bed-to-be, remembering Jeni and someone else I can’t remember telling me to encourage teazles. I later decided to ask why and was told ‘they attract bees’, they certainly do I discovered last summer.
There are a number of jobs requiring attention but I am as usual obsessed with a desire to finish digging the bed I’m 2/3 way through. I’ll work until my back aches then do another task for a while such as watering strawberries under cloches, turning compost or earthing-up the aforementioned potatoes in case of - unimaginable on a day like today but nevertheless not unlikely - frost.

POSTED BY LAURA WILD ON MONDAY, APRIL 30, 2007

3 COMMENTS:

Sue Hepworth said... Nice first posting, Laura. I love the smells. But aren't you a bit of a scaredy cat making people sign in? Why not go public with the blog? Love Sue 1 MAY 2007 10:00

Anonymous said... Teazles are great for goldfinches too! XX Dave 24 NOVEMBER 2007 23:14

laura wild said... Hi Dave I do have goldfinches, they arrive in a gang, do they like teazles dry at this time of year or just when they're flowering? I was just about to dig mine out! 25 NOVEMBER 2007 08:57
Appendix 1.2

Tuesday, 13 November 2007

Spontaneous Actions and Reactions
I’m trying a new way of recording what happens here on the allotment by bringing my laptop with me and typing straight into it and also recording video and images directly into it. I’m interested to see if this allows for a fresher, more direct communication.

It was wet this morning so I decided not to dig and instead when I wandered into the local hardware shop at the end of my dog walk this morning to buy acrylic primer, I came out having acquired 25kg of galvanised wire and the hooks needed to create the fence between me and my bungalow neighbour. I feel slightly guilty spending money so spontaneously and without consultation but it does seem to be not only the best possible solution but also the cheapest. It took me all of an hour to install and the result is an almost invisible boundary... what could be better. It also means I can grow things like sweet peas up it that (as my friend said who I was telling when she walked by) ‘will benefit everyone’. Whilst I was fixing the fence some men came to fit a new clothes drier for my bungalow neighbour on the other side. There was some confusion because I think they thought I lived there and came to talk to me about the washing line, which misled them and ultimately upset my neighbour, and all goes to show how important the fence really is.

Since then I’ve been continuing my mission to prune the elder trees whilst the ground isn’t full of crops that would be crushed by falling branches. The sun is shining on the edge again, it’s such a glorious time of year.

POSTED BY LAURA WILD ON TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2007
1 COMMENT:

Lois said... I think the new technique works well. Seems like a more authentic method. we'll see....
THURSDAY, 3 JANUARY 2008

The Story Unfolds

Awoke to snow falling and thought the ground would be too hard to dig today but arrived to find it perfect for digging, not too wet or dry and not frozen. My 21-year-old fledgling arrived safely in Finland last night to -7degC and snow underfoot and this is just the start of the Finnish winter, it could go as cold as -30! I’m sitting in my shed today and am looking at a selection of images of me, some holding birds closely to my chest and others resting my head on my arms, one curled up asleep and another whispering secrets to a friend. These are redundant etching plates, the editions complete, the work of a friend in St.Ives. When we lived there she and I exchanged my modelling for tuition in and use of her printmaking studio. When I visited her just before Christmas she was wondering how to recycle this plate metal and I asked if I could have it for my allotment to be used in some way, probably practically, to edge a path or something. She said it would weather well, particularly the copper. Now the plates are in my shed I realise how appropriate these images are for my situation here expressing relaxation, contemplation, oneness with nature and last but not by any means least the sharing of confidences, hopes, dreams and the becoming of shared stories.

POSTED BY LAURA WILD AT THURSDAY, JANUARY 03, 2008
THURSDAY, 3 APRIL 2008

Disorientated by Grief

I have entirely lost track of time since Saturday when we lost an hour. We had just turned out our lights at home in solidarity with a global energy saving action for the hour between 8 and 9 when the phone rang. It was someone telling me that one of my most treasured friends had been found dead 3 hours earlier. This made sense of my restlessness that day. I had been here at the allotment and just couldn’t settle to digging even though the sun was shining, so I cleaned out my shed instead. Then the weather became increasingly dismal, dark threatening clouds accompanied by a cold wind. I packed up early and went home to sit by a log fire.

This particular friend had spent the last twenty years of his life living outside of four walls with increasingly little. This was his aim in fact, to live with nothing. He had no income, no running water (just a stream within walking distance), no electricity, no heating apart from a wood stove fashioned out of an old gas bottle, no clothes whenever possible and he cooked on a fire outside. He lived on what he could salvage from other people’s scraps and supermarket skips and the occasional goodwill of some people who respected his lifestyle. For some of these years he was accompanied in this mission by a partner with whom he shared an intense and loving relationship which resulted in three children all born in their tiny bender (makeshift home).

This friend will be sadly missed by many people who encountered him, maybe lived alongside him for a while or just, like me, visited him by way of retreat. In these moments of remembering one thing’s for sure, there will always be laughter.

When I saw him last I was describing my project here on the allotment to him. He had absolutely no problem understanding what I am doing here and the concept of ‘becoming’. I owe so much to him.
Appendix 1.5

THURSDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2007

Neighbourly Interventions

It was an outwardly eventful day yesterday. The bungalow man presented me with a bottle of wine, “It’s not much, would of cost me more if I’d ‘ad to pay someone. You’ll do it again next year won’t you?” I dug his bean patch on Saturday afternoon. He came out to chat to me a couple of times that day and to show me his new jacket, still bearing its label, that he was going to be wearing to a formal dinner that night. The next day he told me, “I had my photo took w’i’ a dicky-bow, I’ll show you when it comes back.” And also how he’d had a disturbed night through indigestion. Over the next few days I’ve heard several recitations of this story to passing neighbours, hard not to since his hearing difficulties cause him to shout. I’m really enjoying this friendship developing.

Also yesterday, the woman who used to have my allotment made her way in to tell me her neighbour, up the lane, has thrown out a carpet and underlay, she’d have a word for me if I’m interested. She also pointed to a gooseberry bush I’ve liberated from weeds and says it has lovely sweet fruit if you can keep the birds off it. I told her I have a whole row of its babies (self-rooted). It’s just occurred to me that I could have a table in my gateway of surplus fruit bushes for path-users to help themselves to.

Not long after this the owner of the carpet (it turns out) and her little boys, stopped to talk about the no-bonfire rule and offered use of her bonfire site up the top of the lane as an alternative way of disposing of burnable waste. She took me up to see it.
Appendix 2: Footnote List

1 http://laurawild.blogspot.com/2007_04_01_archive.html
3 http://www.laurawild.co.uk
4 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/skull/digging.html
5 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/skull/deaddogs.html
6 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/pumpkin/process.html
7 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/potato/walking.html
8 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/potato/george.html
9 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/potato/repetition.html
10 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/potato-market.html
11 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/pumpkin/dc.html
12 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/poppy/bee.html
13 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/spade/shed.html
14 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/skull/AT%20movie.html
15 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/alsia.html
16 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/skull/harold.html
17 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/silver.html
18 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/heart/silver_cast.html
19 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/carrotman/hest.html
20 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/hinge/shu.html
21 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/hinge/bloc.html
22 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/hinge/bloc.html
23 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/ball/yorkwisp.html
24 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/ball/nephew.html
25 http://www.laurawild.co.uk/ball/bg.html
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